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Márton Szepsi Csombor

Hollandia

A Hungarian Account, 1620

In respectful service
I dedicate
to my distinguished and learned masters,
István Almási, András Varannai
and György Zoltán,
my generous supporters and patrons,
this account of the greatest wonder of the world
in both fruitfulness and naval power,
Hollandia and Zélandia.

Those who are nowadays called Belgians and Batavians were of old peoples of Germany, being among the timid who, expelled from their native land through internal strife, left Germany, and some of them settled beside the river called Mosa on the border with Gallia, and the remainder in the region beside where the Rhenus flows into the sea. The latter is called Hollandia, the former Brabantia. They have the benefit of the two famous rivers Mosa and Rhenus, furthermore, they have other fishing rivers. In ancient times the waters of Rhenus did not flow into the sea where they do now, at Dordrechtum, but near Lugdunum[1]. At the time of the birth of Christ our Lord this land was desolate; no man lived there and it was but forest. In later times, however, because of the waves and tumult of the sea the whole land was lost in a great flood, and so since then there can be no firm ground, but the soil is sandy. Its circumference is no more than fifty-two

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Márton Szepsi Csombor (1595–1622)
is the author of Europica Varietas, *the first travel book written in Hungarian. He was born in Northern Hungary (now Slovakia) into a poor artisan family, studied locally and in Transylvania, later in the city of Kassa (Košice). He became a schoolmaster, then in 1616 travelled to Danzig, where he studied philosophy and theology at the university, and subsequently qualified as a Calvinist minister. He set out from there on his long-planned journey to see foreign lands and meet people. Most of the time he travelled on foot and his sojourns were brief, as he tried to see as much as his modest means allowed. He visited Poland, Denmark, Holland, Frisia, France, England, Germany, Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia before returning home in 1618. While writing his book he taught in Kassa, later as a minister and teacher he became a member of an aristocratic household. His book appeared in Kassa in 1620 and was a success. He fell victim to the plague in 1622. His chapter on England appeared in* HQ 171, *Autumn 2003.*

Hungarian miles[2], and if a man stands in the middle of Hollandia he can walk out of the country in any direction in a day, and in this compact area there are some thirty-one towns surrounded by walls of brick, of which thirteen are of some renown, and which I shall speak in speciali descriptione. The rulers in it used to be the Kings of Hispania, and when one of their dukes, Albanus by name, had eighteen thousand persons killed on account of the true religion, they were compelled for their own protection to rise against that great tyrant, and so they twice defeated all the king's forces on the British ocean and cast off their yoke from their neck, and now the States, which they call *ordo,* rule in aristocratic fashion. Belli ductor among them is the mighty prince Mauritius of the House of Orange, whose abode is in the town of Haga. The device of the land is a lion crammed into a wooden frame. They have no stoves but baking-ovens, and those in the earth, no vine-hills, no ploughland, no wood, at which you may certainly wonder how there can be sustenance there for men, and yet in Amsterrodamum alone the inhabitants number twice a hundred thousand[3]. There is a great wealth of meadow-land on which are countless cattle, and the cows there are as big as any oxen in Hungary, and their cheese is exceeding good, white, red and green alike. The folk are kindly and cleaner than any nation under heaven; only for lack of wood they enjoy very scruffy food, because even those of high degree bake only twice in a whole week, on Sunday and Wednesday, and on other days they eat nothing but boiled meat and cold roast, and if they warm it up certainly the taste is worse, because it is warmed on a fire fuelled by turf and dung, which taints all their food. The people here have the nature of the waves of the sea, very seldom yielding to another but standing against all, hospitable in their manner, and in their dress following a style different to that of any other German nation. No land under heaven has better seamen than this, who are called Palinuruses[4] on account of their peregrinations to south and north, in the course of which what they have suffered, seen and heard I could write here, and I know that it would arouse the astonishment of all readers of all times, but that I should not speak of it is brought about by the narrow and costly nature of book-printers in our country.

The girls are, just as in Danzig, grown up and so given in marriage in their thirty-second year. At this point I may recall something to the honour of the girls. Once a year, for three days in winter, in accordance with the law and custom of the entire country the girls summon the young men of similar age onto the water to race for a certain prize, which is put up by the magistrate, and the girls bind onto the feet of the youths (who do the same in return) skates made of bone or wood, but these are not such as I have seen in Hungary, where those that go on the ice hold in their hands a stick tipped with a great piece of iron, but by artfully kicking and pushing their feet they set off in the sight of all the people and move so fast that no horse on earth can catch them. Their ordinary gait too is sheer elegance, and there is no Cleopatra, no Camilla, no Amazon to compare with them, so very tall but exceeding slender are they, for many per-

sons of quality bring up their daughters from early youth in body-squeezing garments made of strong, thick cloth that their waists may acquire a fine posture.

In all this land there are no itinerant beggars, but those that deserve it are kept in hospices, whereas any that would be capable of work and give themselves over to beggary without cause are taken to a place that I shall report below.

The towns through which I passed are the following: on the eighth day of May we disembarked from the Baltic, Pomeranian, Swedish, Norwegian and Friesian seas and rendered hearty thanks to God that He had set us free from maritime storms and sickness, for we had grown truly weary of travelling by sea. We therefore entered Amsterdamum.

AMSTERDAMUM, which is otherwise named Amstellodamum, is situated on the inlet of the German ocean named Tia, and is in our time the greatest emporium in the world except for Lisibona, Velence[5], Quinzai and Antverpia. The number of its inhabitants exceeds 200,000, not counting foreigners, and it lies at sub gradu longitudinis 38, latitudinis 43 degrees, minuta 20. In its streets, as, it is said, in Velence, one can go everywhere by ship, because great waterways penetrate everywhere from the harbour.

Its foundations are entirely based on wooden columns alone, and if anyone would build a house he first excavates the earth on the spot very deeply and drives into the ditch the trunks of many alder trees, and upon them begins the building of the house, from whence it comes that such tall houses are not to be found among them as in Danzig, where in many places there are houses of no less than eight storeys one above the other. In Amsterdam the foundation of a house is more costly than the superstructure. The streets are handsome and clean, with sides all paved with bricks, set, in many a place edgeways, glazed, at which one may be astounded, and cleanliness is maintained because no wagon may ever enter the town, nor any on horseback except the Prince or a great lord. It has many fine schools and famous book-printers, a multitude of well-stocked apothecaries, handsome pleasure gardens, etc. The public buildings of note are these: the churches, the Arsenal, the Council House, the hospitals and the *Zuchthaus*[6], or house for instruction in morals and work. There are eight churches in the town: the Old Church, the New Church, St Klara's, St Margaret's, that of the Minorites, St Mary the Virgin's, St Mary Magdalene's and St Barbara's.

The Old Church is supported on thirty-four huge round white columns. In it there are two big organs, and the glass of the windows is richly and finely decorated with historical scenes. There is one epitaph of note, raised by the whole country to one Jakob Hemskerk, who voyaged to the north and twice to the south, and on all occasions met with triumph against the enemy, but then was killed at the town of Gades[7] and his earthly remains brought here to be buried in 1604. That called the New Church has forty-two stone columns, in it there are fifteen fine hanging candlesticks, and the sanctuary is divided from the body of the church by a grille of pure Venetian copper, but there is nothing else of inter-

est therein other than the skins of a crocodile and a whale. The Walloons, who could not remain in their land to practise the true religion but fled hither, are accustomed to have the sermon preached to them in French in this church.

The whole town otherwise has five prominent towers, the finest of which is that now being built entirely of costly dressed stone. The houses, for the most part, are roofed with stone instead of tiles or shingles, and the roofs are as beautiful as if they were of sheet iron. The Council House, free of all decoration, is in the Fishmongers' Street, and above the door is written in costly letters of gold:

Audi et alteram partem.

There are many hospices, many houses for the sick, and beggars are never to be seen in this town because they are not suffered to go in the marketplace, but if a man lacks the strength to work he goes to a certain place where he is taken up and carried to a hospice, but if he is not deserving of charity and is yet a beggar woe betide him, no doubt, for he is taken to the Zuchthaus, where it is seen whether he can eat or not. My God, what great charitableness there is among them, you would see some hundreds of persons lying sick and beside every four a woman who attends to their needs etc. There are a number of public places for deserted orphans too, where they live, are instructed in a variety of crafts, and are all alike made to go about in red clothing. On one of their houses I saw written in letters of gold:

Gott ist der Weysen Helffer. Ps 10[8].

Children deserted by lewd persons too have fine houses and are well cared for.

What is meant by the *Zuchthaus* (called by clerks *domus disciplinaris*) is as follows. As in all places, but principally among them, there are to be found such like as depraved boys who, paying no heed to their fathers and mothers, run to all manner of evildoing, prodigals, blasphemers, fighters, lecherous and the rest: with that in mind the wise and worthy Council has caused a common house to be built in which their evil ways may in time be curbed, and therein all manner of craftsmen that one can conceive of, and therefore not only local persons but others too from many countries send wicked boys thither, and they are put to that which the attendants there consider fitting for them, one to be a clerk, another a smith, a tailor, a carpenter, a goldsmith, and other crafts, but both in the craft and before entering upon it they are surely so brought to heel that even had they been roaring lions they change into gentle lambs. First their obedience is tested in various labours: they carry stone from one place to another from dawn to dusk, draw water from wells into tubs and then pour it back into the well, some are made to do pargetting, some to sing, there are irons on the feet of some and the necks of others, they are made to saw, sometimes to jump, sometimes they are made to lie prone in the sun, and as for those that will not do it, or who appear idle, there is a room almost like in the Prince's stables at Heidelberg or in

the King's court at Prague, in which there is a great brass figure in the likeness of a man, in which there are thousands of small holes, and there is only one window in the room, and that as high as a man can reach; the idler is shut in this room with a vessel suited to his hands, water is allowed to enter the brass man and emerges from it at such speed that there is never any corner of the room where one can remain dry; the water rises continually and there is nowhere to climb, and so let him see, either he throws the water from the window above his head or he will surely drown in it. Some bale until the skin is completely removed from both hands, but some abandon themselves to desperate measures, and if one is the son of a man of quality and brought up from early youth to be pampered he will be a very long time drowning in the water, swimming, weeping, shouting, beseeching, and such a one is often taken out half dead. In short, one is in Purgatory in that room. They have enough to do but little bread. The town profits immensely from the workhouse, because although it pays the craftsmen a yearly wage countless faithful servants bring in for the town of a Monday around noon all kinds of things, such as cloth, wood, leather, lime, earth, iron, tallow etc. to be worked on for little more than bread and water, and by the morning they take out everything finished. Some of these poor ones are in there for a year, some for two years, some for longer. On one occasion they all very secretly plotted that each would kill his master or instructor, but one, I know not whether out of pity or rather moved by the greater torment that would come upon him in future, wrote in red chalk the following words of Vergil on one of the houses:

Quondam etiam victis redit in praecordia virtus
Victoresque cadunt Danai.

That is to say: At times courage returns even to the hearts of the defeated, and the victorious Greeks fall. On seeing that (as animadversio is kept for the least thing), the attendants that lived there began by means of beating to enquire who had written it and to what end, in the course of which the whole affair and treacherous resolve were revealed, and the wretched attention that had been paid them was redoubled. Beggars undeserving of charity too are brought here. I was certainly horrified at the mere sight of this house, because above the big gate was an effigy of a man sitting in a wagon, and beside and before him many saws, hoes, shears, stakes, sickles etc. Above the man is written in letters of gold:

Virtutis est domare ea, quae cuncti pavent.[9]

The wagon is drawn by tigers, lions, wolves and bears.

The town has two splendid promenades, the one of which is the Bazilika, which stands on thirty-six legs of black stone, and its floor too is of the same black marble. The other is a wooden building, the floor of which is of loose sand and the edges wooden boards, and it stands on sixty wooden columns, with very fine pictures. Its coat of arms is three crosses one above the other, thus: ✝ ✝ ✝

The people of the male sex are exceeding fat, while the women and girls are tall and exceeding slender. Women of middle rank wear black cloaks, but in such a way that their heads, on which they wear no kerchief, are covered by the same cloak, and on the part that hangs over the forehead there is a horn, no different to the way in which the Nuremberg printer displays the picture of the Devil in that little book of the New Testament intended for children. Those of the upper class wear nothing over their skirts, but they put on several skirts and the outermost they wrap about their necks, which in our women would seem very uncouth, but there it is quite respectable. It is a very big town, and ships, which come every day from a great variety of countries and lands, have a calm anchorage there. While I was there I saw one ship the like of which I had never seen, gleaming with fine gilded porches; it had six very long cannon aboard and was a privateer that plundered Spain. This town is famous for its many exploits, but in particular for three voyages, to India and the north, with the account of which I could fill another book like this, but I will de consulto omit them.

In this town one of my companions, Gregorius Sziglovski, parted from me, hastening by another road to the Duke of Flanders. Our lodging was in the Sylvanus, the Wild Man of the Woods, and we gave a *forint* each daily to our host and he kept us with good beer but quite awful food indeed. From there we went by ship to the famous town of Lugdunum, where I saw for the very first time on a house:

Spernere nullum, spernere mundum, spernere sese,
Spernere sperni, quattuor illa beant[10].

LUGDUNUM, which is called Batavorum, is, after Amsterdamum, the most famous town in Holland, and I do not believe that there could be a more beautiful town under Heaven to delight Nature. Because first there is in it the true worship of God. Secondly, its position is in very fine meadowland, although it too has its foundations laid constantly in water, its folk are remarkably handsome, its waters exceeding good, its defence a very great dyke, as in Amsterdam, the sea has no ebb that would make the town stink, all its buildings are exceeding beautiful and one can scarce tell one street from another because every street of this town too has a big waterway that bears cargo vessels, and the waterside has been planted everywhere in the town with fine lindens, vine-stocks have been allowed to grow on the houses and only the windows are to be seen, there are fine amusement gardens and skittle alleys in addition to bathhouses, good windmills and countless stone bridges (I do not know if I recalled in the description of Amsterdam above, there are in that town more than two hundred bridges). I may write of the public places thus: Forty-two great stone columns support the church of St Peter, and it has two very big organs and many fine epitaphs. In this church I saw for the first time women regularly sitting side by side with men, so much so that it frequently happens that each may sit beside one whom they do

not dislike, and I opine that in Hungary this law, or at least custom, would be little in favour with married persons, because our people magna laborant zelotipia.[11] The other big church is called the Old Church; it is very big, circular in shape, has thirty-eight stone columns, there is not one idol in it, the organs are fine, and on that occasion a young minister was preaching ex 6. capite Joannis: *Nisi manducaveritis carnem*[12]. Outside the church of the Virgin Mary is the famous book-printer officina Plantiniana, and to pass the time I often went in. The Praetorium is built of dressed stone from foundation to roof, and men in the service of Prince Mauritius are constantly most vigilant before it. On it is the principal clock, the many bells of which ring out so finely every twenty-five minutes so that those going to and fro in the town (that they be not hungry) believe themselves to be at a wedding-feast at all times. The other clocks too are all similar. In a word, the town is a Paradisus terrestris. One of its main gates is built in almost the same form as the High Gate in Danzig. Their device, like that of the Pope, is two keys. In the middle of the town is a great jail, and beside it a gallows on which those deserving it are first garrotted and then the body is removed to a gibbet outside the town; I enquired the reason for this custom of theirs, and was told that it is done because if they were taken there straight away the people would run out to watch, and in the town there might be a great fire or rioting the while. The university was a building in a great street and surpassed in height all buildings of the whole town, even the churches, and building has now begun because it was completely burnt down, and it has been moved to another street. There I heard a lecture by the then Grand Rector, John Poliander, *de bonis operibus*[13]. He entered the school in very dignified fashion, two silver rods being borne before him. I stayed for the lecture of a lawyer too, who taught *de excusatione tutorum*[14] the following: four categories of person may not undertake guardianship: 1. The very old, who are by nature unwell at all times; 2. Young men of less than twenty-five years, whose minds are frivolous; 3. Military persons, because they are rarely present; 4. The insane. Such was the teaching of the pious doctor of law. My lodging was in the Lily of France, and I paid 28 *stiver* a day. This is the town from which the Arminian heresy[15] recently sprang.

HAGA, the present abode of Prince Mauritius, is only three miles from Lugdunum. The whole town no doubt accepted the said heresy, and the wise Prince, in order to determine how many there might be that had deserted their religion, had a new church built, installed his own minister, caused him to preach and realised that few remained in it. He convened an assembly at a village called Sluy (as he did last year at Dordrechtum, to which he also summoned doctors from Germany) at which the Bishop of Delphus opposed them with great and godly arguments, but nevertheless three ministers, also from Delphus, persisted in that falsehood, and the Prince sent them into exile and those he chose in their places he made swear thrice over that they would at all times remain in that religion in which His Highness Prince Mauritius is.

FORSCHOT is a village in which, when I went there alone (for the minister my companion had gone on the water) I heard in a grove as I passed the sound of very sorrowful singing, and when I sought to see what it was, behold, in a wretched little lath-and-plaster house a woman, certainly not ugly of face, was singing the fifty-first psalm in the Lobwasser version[16]. When I enquired why she gave herself up to such solitude, she replied, sighing deeply: she had had a dear husband in devoted marriage, after whose death she wished for the cheering sight and pleasant conversation of no one, and not even the sight of men. As I came away from there I heard the note of the cuckoo, and rendered thanks to God that He had permitted me to live until then, because to my sure knowledge in the two years that I had lived in Danzig I had not heard its voice.

PROBERGK is a very pretty village, and has only one row of houses but the street is paved with brick. There I bought for eight *pénz* a little honey-cake such as in Hungary I would not have gladly given a single *pénz* for; in its meadow, as it was here that I first began to take a long walk, my nose bled.

In DELPHUS I first observed the wall of the town, the decoration of which pleased me greatly. Above the gate is a host of effigies of German footsoldiers in splendid array, looking as if they are about to leap down upon one. I took lodgings in the Milkmaid, where I paid eight *garas* for a dinner and three for a bed. On a house I observed these verses:

Fide Deo, divina beat promissio, fallit
Spes hominum quamvis splendida, fide Deo[17].

There is not a single stove in this town either, as in all Holland likewise, but they make fire from wood made from dung, which they call *torff*. The town has extensive fields, and there, for the first time in two years, I saw a herd of swine, but they had all been swabbed. There are two churches beside that of the hospitals, the Old and the New. The tower of the Old Church is stone to the very top and has fifteen balconies, while that of the New Church has eight. At the time the Council House had been destroyed by fire. Here I saw a fine epitaph, a finer than which I had hitherto seen nowhere; it is of alabaster and on it a woman is so artfully carved that I could not believe that it was an effigy with regard to clothing and face until I had felt it with my hand[18]. It is in memory of one Elizabeth Morgan. Orphan children go dressed all in red, as in Amsterdam and Lugdunum, and learn various trades. The Old Church is like in shape to the New, standing on thirty-four columns. We went to the hospital of the sick, where we were amazed at how many sick there were, and before each the food and drink that he desired, at his foot a chamber-pot, his shoes for going out, and if he desires it a servant comes at once to each and reads the Bible; adjacent are a brewery and a kitchen, there are in the courtyard of the hospital all manner of tradesmen, and the ward for women is on the right as one enters, that for men on the left. Here my second companion, Emmanuel, the minister from Lusitania,

left me, and to my great sorrow I was left alone but nevertheless prepared to go to Rotterdam.

ROTTERDAMUM. I entered through the Delphus gate and as I was seeking an inn a Christian widow woman called me to her house beneath the sign of a sea snail. I put down my baggage (which consisted of nothing but a shirt and a prayer-book) and went out to see the town. Its churches are like in form to the rest that I have already described, so that if anyone has seen one church in Holland he has seen them all, and the same is true of the disposition of the towns, the many bridges and canals, the morals etc. Rotterdam, however, differs from the other towns in that here all manner of religions are present in greater numbers, Calvinists, Papists, Arians, Arminians and the rest. It has exceeding great strong bastions facing the sea, a good harbour and very deep, where one may see with pleasure every day no small number of ships from many countries and lands. This town is the home of the great Erasmus Rotterodamus, of whom it is said:

Huic uni licuit dicere, quod libuit[19].

The town has set up a statue in his honour on the bridge in the middle of the town, in the left hand of which is a book and in the right a tablet with the words:

ERASMUS NATUS ROTTERDAMI OCTOBRIS 26 ANNO 1467.
OBIIT BASILEAE 11 JULII ANNO 1536

His face is like that of an old woman, beardless, and his hat, as those of canons customarily are, square; on both sides statues of lions hold the arms of the town.

I saw the 114 naval cannon of this town, and the largest of its many ships are those named Erasmus and Jonas. On the Erasmus is an inscription which says, being translated:

WHEN I WAS BUILT I WAS NAMED ERASMUS

There is a picture of him on it, from which it is clear in what great honour Erasmus was held even in his native town. The town has many windmills, and wagons may enter it. Fish is cheap, but bread and meat as costly as elsewhere in the land, and wine more expensive still. There is a fine promenade near the water on seventeen wooden columns. Here one does not see many ships without cannon, as in Danzig, Denmark and Amsterdamum, because of the fear of armed pirates on the sea, and so there are ships very well fitted out with 24, 25, 26, 27 or 28 cannon, trumpeters, many men and banners. Having seen all these things I meant to go directly to England, but my widow woman, when she had found out from me why I was wandering, that is, only to see countries, seas, towns, castles and peoples, and to learn among them of their fine things, would not permit that I should go straight to London but she herself for seventy-five *pénz* engaged a boatman who was about to leave for Zélandia to take me there. I took my leave

of her and thanked her for such great kindness (ah, may the Lord God grant her blessings all her life) and embarked in the ship, which was called the Grey Cat, and next day, the wind being favourable, we reached Dodrechtum.

DODRECHTUM, although a town of Hollandia, is more inclined towards Zélandia now that the latter too is ruled by a prince. It is an exceeding strong town on a small island surrounded by terribly deep waters, for which reason it has never fallen into foreign hands. Its eight bastions that face Hollandia are of dressed stone to the ground. It has a large harbour. On one of its gates the portrait of the Virgin Mary is depicted with great skill, and perhaps—I do not know—that may be their device. They have a very large Council House on which the admirable clock, as we passed, was playing the 139th Psalm editionis Lobwasserianae.

We continued on our way towards Zélandia by ship, where I was amazed at how very much the people enjoyed tobacco, by which I mean: *Tobacco* is a Spanish word, and in Latin it is called *herba Nicotiana,* from the name of the man who first discovered the usefulness of this grass. It comes from the New World, and its uses are: 1. If someone is going on a journey by sea or in the desert where no bread is to be found he takes a piece, lights it, breathes in the smoke, and will not be hungry or thirsty for very many days without food and drink, but will be able to do all his work as when he has come from a pleasing dinner. 2. If one would take *malozsa*[20], wine or some other drink only for the sake of drunkenness, let him not go to such expense but take six pénz worth of tobacco, enjoy it for a quarter of an hour and—I will guarantee—certainly he could be no more drunk if he had spent four or five *forints* on *malozsa.* I have read in Monardus and Clusius of other uses for it, but these I have actually tried. A barber's lad from Brema, who was setting out for Libya, kept me well supplied with rolls of tobacco every day while I was aboard. We reached that strong fortress, Rankes[21], which may well have no elegance about it but its strength without and within is beyond measure and worthy of admiration. At the time many of Mauritius' powerful ships were moored beside it, loaded with victuals and weapons in preparation for a voyage to Mauritania. From here we quickly came to Middelburgum.

MIDDELBURG is by far the chief town of Zélandia, and its situation and all its buildings are like those of the other towns in the country. It has two great towers. Its device is a gate or rather a portion of a street, from whence it takes the name Middelburg, that is, 'half-town' or 'middle of a town'. Here for the first time I saw a Pasquinus column, or Pasquillus, as it is now called, on which, as was the Roman practice, those who dare not come face to face with their opponents in open argument stick abusive writings under cover of darkness. I also saw outside almost every house a flag on a tall pole, and when I enquired for what reason they were put up I was told that visiting merchants and local inhabitants too, who were not householders but lived in rented property, had, after Easter, to quit the rented houses and every year to enter into a new engagement, and that the flags were raised as proof that the house had now been freed from

the possession of a foreigner, and in those days there was feasting everywhere in the country. The best port in the country for England is here.

FLISSINGA[22] is indeed a handsome town, and there is in Zélandia none stronger, fortified with water by nature, and with strong bastions and a great dyke by men against the Spaniards in nearby Flanders. There are many cannon on every bastion, it has fine towers and is adorned with the house of the Prince of Zélandia. Its fine Council House, none more handsome than which have I seen in the countries that I have yet visited, stands on twelve arches, every last part of dressed stone, there are great stone statues on it and the device of the town, which is three curving rivers, from which the town takes its name, as 'river' is in German *Fluss* and in Belgian *Flis,* from whence comes Flissinga. The good sized marketplace of the town is square, wide and ample. The big church is adorned with many fine epitaphs, but there is no writing on them, but they are so piled high with helmets, firearms and broadswords that if one were to enter the church unawares one might take it for an armoury. It has a fine tower and three aisles. The Prince's house is of costly dressed stone to the very ground. In this church the priests have a queer custom: before the sermon one reads a chapter from the Bible, and after that says aloud the Ten Commandments, to which another priest responds, thus: The first says 'Thou shalt have no other gods but me', and the second responds 'God save us from that', and so on, one after the other. When he reaches 'Honour thy father and thy mother', the response is 'God so help us all'. So strong is this town in its true religion that if, apart from merchants, any Papist or Arminian entered it they would be killed anywhere in the streets, and not only here but in any town in Zélandia. While I was there I went up around noon to a small church hard by the large harbour, and this was very greatly to my regret, because the preacher who was expounding at the time was in all respects, in face, speech, gesture, age and gaze, so like my dear kind master, patron and kinsman Mihály Szepsi Láni, now pastor of the parish in Szatmár, that if I had known that he was at the time in Germany I would have sworn a thousand times that it was he. It saddened me, however, that he whom I had long desired to see had suddenly appeared before me simulated by the shadow of time. In this place the sea has a great tide, the smell from which almost made me ill, and for six whole hours, that is, from nine o'clock until three in the afternoon, the waters in the town run from the streets to the sea, and the streets are waterless, ships are grounded, by three o'clock the water turns back and raises up the ships, as it does in Amsterdam and Lugdunum, but there one can scarce notice it whereas in this town no water remains. I saw no cheaper fish in the country than here, because one as big as an eighteen-month-old child could be bought for eight garas. I took lodging at the Three Saracen Girls on the sea shore, which, as ships do not tarry, I was obliged to leave at seven in the evening and all the same was made to pay twelve stiver for bed and dinner, as if I had slept and dined there, and when I sought to reproach them,

saying that I would not spend the night there and therefore was not in their debt for a bed, their only reply was: Whether you spend the night or not, you shall certainly not leave until you pay, for it was your intention to sleep here. On hearing that, at once there came to my mind the action of the thieving servants of a nobleman (whom I could name) by the Szamos, here in Hungary, who, if a poor serf's oxen, even if from over the Szamos, so much as looked into their master's meadow, drove them in because it was their intention to enter and released them only on payment of a fine. Thinking therefore that if even in one's native land one can be so scurvily used, why should I save myself in a foreign country? I opened the mouth of my purse and gave it to them. As I did so I was aware of the truth of the veriverbium: *Peregrinans duos saccos debet habere, alterum patientiae, alterum pecuniae.*[23]

And so we left Zélandia, and having sailed with the help of God a day and a night on the Zelandicus oceanus we arrived at the coast of England in the mouth of the Tamesis, where, going up a whole fifteen miles, we arrived in the metropolis of England, Londinum. ❧

Translated by Bernard Adams

NOTES

1 ■ Lugdunum Batavorum, a Latin name given in the late 16th century to Leyden.

2 ■ The *mérföld* or Hungarian mile was 8.354 metres in length, roughly equal to five English miles.

3 ■ This figure is about double the actual population at the time

4 ■ Palinurus was Aeneas's helmsman.

5 ■ Csombor breaks with his usual use of Latin for place-names by naming Venice in Hungarian.

6 ■ The workhouse.

7 ■ Cadiz.

8 ■ God is the helper of the fatherless (Psalm 10:14).

9 ■ It is the function of courage to tame those of which all men are afraid.

10 ■ These four things bring happiness: despise no man, adornment and oneself, and despise the scorn of others.

11 ■ Are much exercised by jealousy.

12 ■ Except ye eat the flesh [of the Son of man]. John 6:53.

13 ■ ...concerning good works.

14 ■ ...concerning the rejection of guardians.

15 ■ Jacobus Arminius, properly Jakob Hermandszoon (1560–1609), became Professor of Theology at Leyden in 1603 but rejected the high Calvinistic doctrine of absolute predestination, maintaining that God wills that all men should attain salvation.

16 ■ The Lutheran Ambrosius Lobwasser (1515–85) made a German translation of the Geneva Psalter.

17 ■ Trust in God, the divine promise brings happiness; hope in man deceives, however splendid—trust in God.

18 ■ This celebrated epitaph is in fact in the Old Church.

19 ■ This man alone might say what he pleased.

20 ■ A dessert wine. *Malozsa* (today *mazsola*) is Hungarian for raisin.

21 ■ Rammekens.

22 ■ Vlissingen, also called Flushing in English.

23 ■ The traveller must have two bags, one of patience, the other of money.

Ádám Nádasdy

Poems

Translated by David Hill

The Umbrella

Az esernyő

The umbrella kept opening all the time.
He tried in vain to make its spirits quieter.
It was like riding the tram with an eagle.
Its opening button was jammed inside.
He poked at it, and it jumped far away
It rolled away into a place unknown.
A lot of people looked beneath themselves,
as folks will do at such times, out of pity.
Then he produced his key, and with it pressed
the naked spring located in the handle,
whereon the crazed umbrella opened wide
and with a rustle claimed a massive space
and snagged on everything. Which people frowned on:
"Does his umbrella open with a key?"
The only option left was to be rough:
to grasp the thing together at the neck,
still wriggling slightly, then let silence reign.

Ádám Nádasdy

is a poet and linguist who has been teaching linguistics at the School of English and American Studies of Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest since 1972. He has published four volumes of poems and a collection of essays on language. He has also retranslated several plays by Shakespeare known in classical translations, because he believes modern audiences should have access to more readable texts.

The Bronze Dog

A bronzkutya

It stood with legs spread wide, upon a
little square pedestal made of bronze,
whose base was coated with green felt, worn down
to a thread. One of the corners of the felt
hung down; you had to hold it to its place
so that it wouldn't fold in when put down.
The dog was coiled around upon itself,
hoping to bite the flea in its back leg
with a fine snap of teeth, with gums drawn back,
with something almost seeming like a smile.
Then, needing money for a flat, they sold
whatever they could. The dog went. My grandfather
was fond of using it to press things down.
"Press down the paperwork with that old dog,
lad, if the draft comes through," he'd always say.
The child, though, cheeky pedant that he was,
would point out that it's better done before.
It's too late when the draft's already come.
"Clever, you're clever," the old man would say.
He loved that flea-ridden, disgusting dog,
which every evening shitted little pellets
of bronze, and delicately buried them
in the pedestal's crumbling, grassy mud.

The Toy Train

A villanyvonat

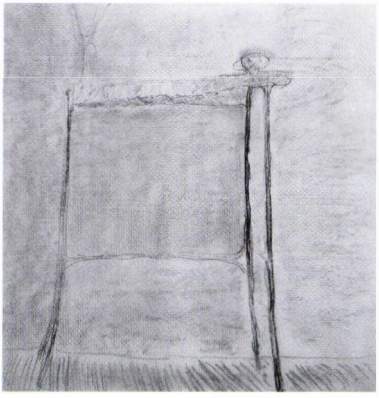
The toy train kept on jumping off the tracks,
gave fierce electric shocks, and you could
never properly change its switch-points over.
My daddy brought it from the Soviet Union.
My folks explained, with sadness, that's as much
as one could buy there—plus the floor-polisher.
The wooden box it came in seemed quite promising,
such a big box, a smaller child might fit
inside it; but when I attempted this,
it proved in vain. Its booklet had Cyrillic script,

Ilka Gedő: *Sleeping Woman in the Ghetto,* from folder 10, 1944. Pencil, paper, 280 x 216 mm, signed at lower right: Gedő Ilka, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest.

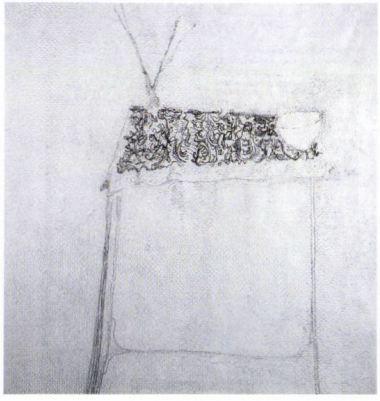
Ilka Gedő: *Self-Portrait VI,* from folder 35, 1947. Pencil, coal, paper, 470 x 340 mm, inscribed at lower left: 1947 (ősz-tél?) (?) [1947 (autumn-winter (?)], Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest.

Ilka Gedő: *Self-Portrait in Pregnancy I,* from folder 51, 1947. Pastel, paper, 405 x 220 mm, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest.

Ilka Gedő: *Table 8,* 1949. Pastel, paper, 650 x 610 mm, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest.

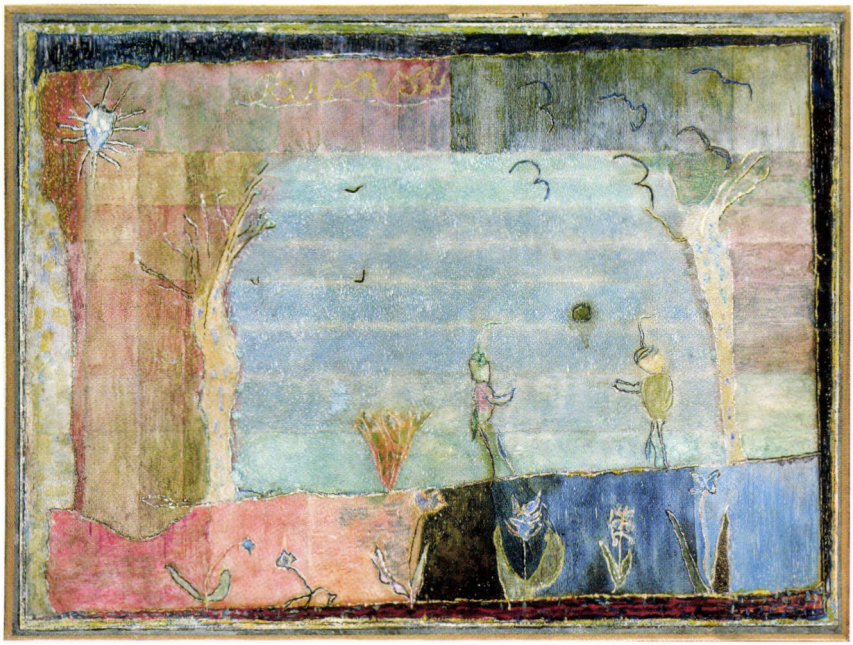


Ilka Gedő: *Table with Table Cloth I,* 1949. Pencil, paper, 675 x 650 mm, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest.

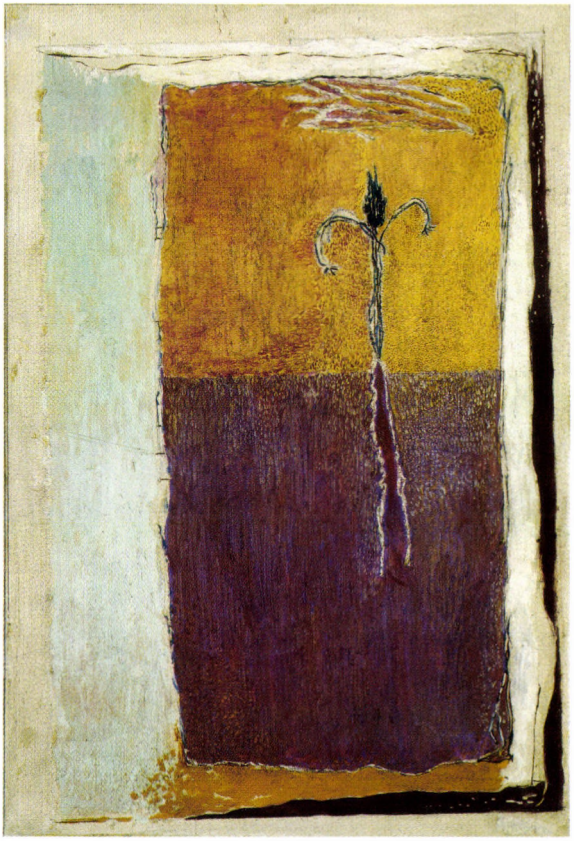


Ilka Gedő: *Fruit Trees in Bloom*, 1969. Oil on wooden board, 38 x 55 cm. Private collection.

Ilka Gedő: *Parcelled Rose Garden*, 1970–71. Oil on canvas, 60 x 43.5 cm. Private collection.

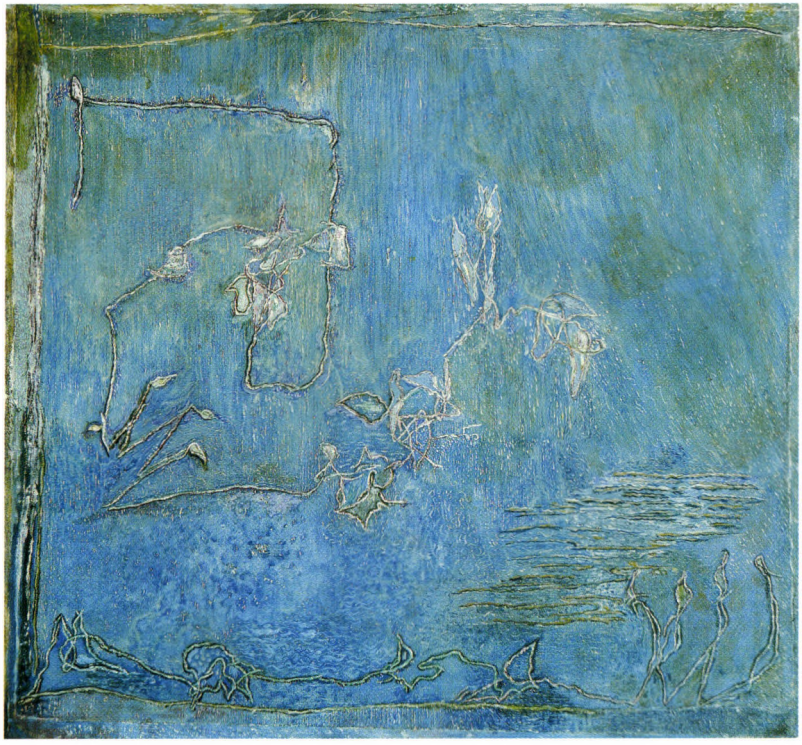


Ilka Gedő: *Spring,* 1971.
Oil on paper laid down on canvas,
44.5 x 59 cm. Private collection.



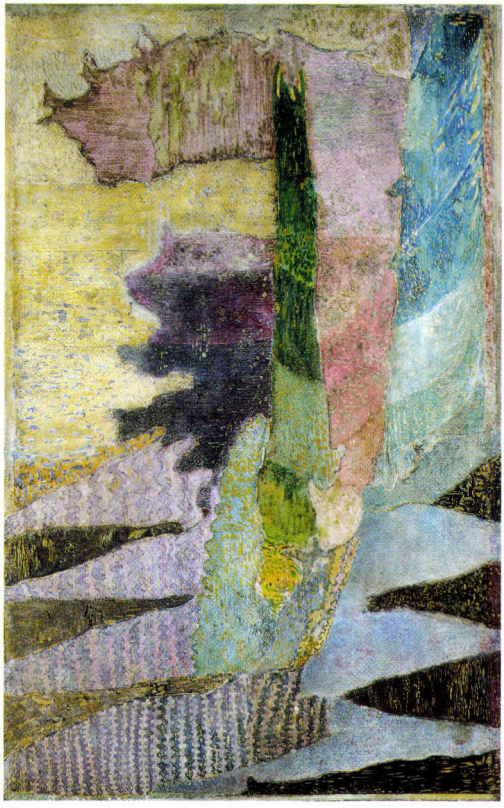
Ilka Gedő: *Self-portrait Flower,*
1971. Oil on canvas, 48 x 33 cm.
Private collection.

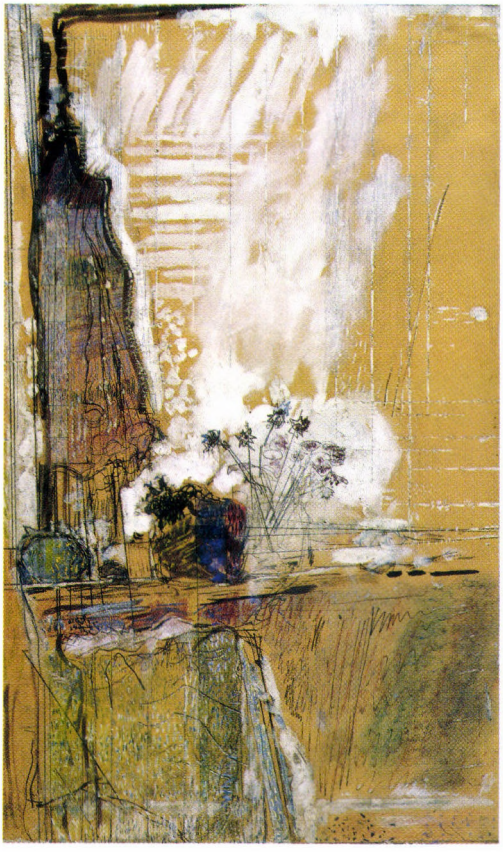
Ilka Gedő: *Nodding Artificial Flower (Red Version)*, 1971–72.
Oil on canvas,
34 x 35 cm.
Private collection.



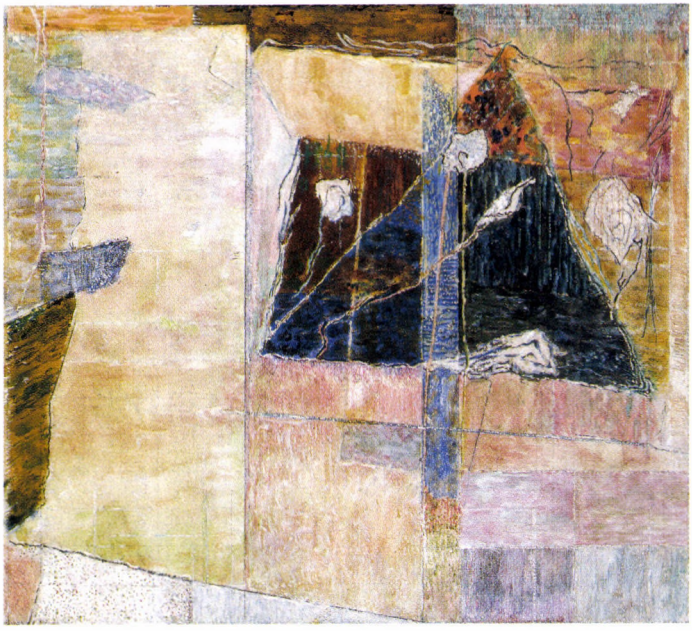
Ilka Gedő:
Rose Garden through Closed Eyes,
1972.
Oil on paper laid down on canvas,
60 x 48 cm.
Private collection.

Ilka Gedő: *Lilacs II,* 1973.
Oil on canvas, 58 x 37 cm.
Private collection.



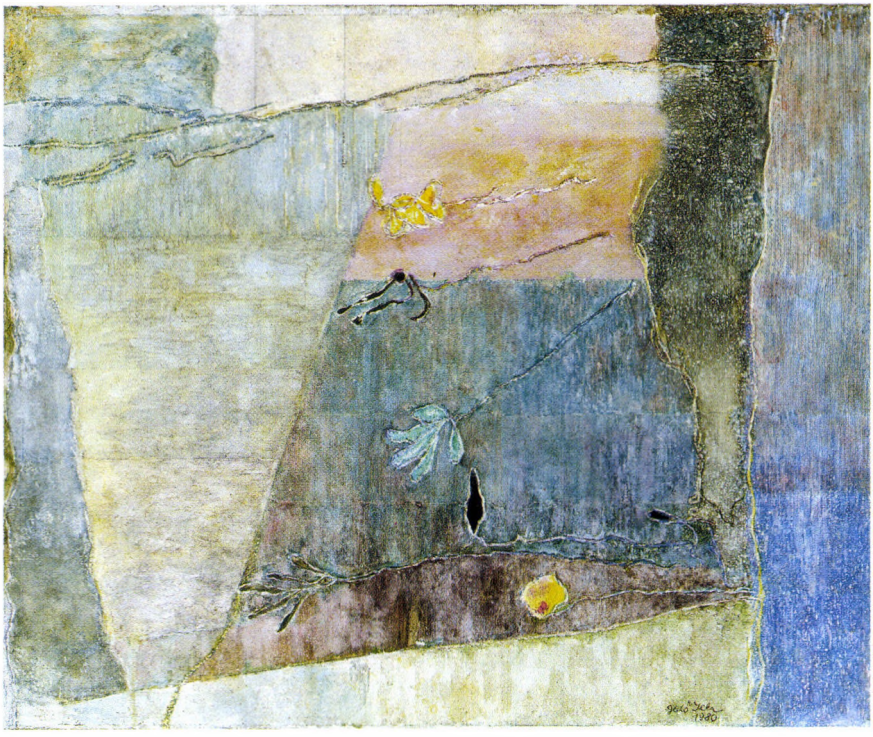


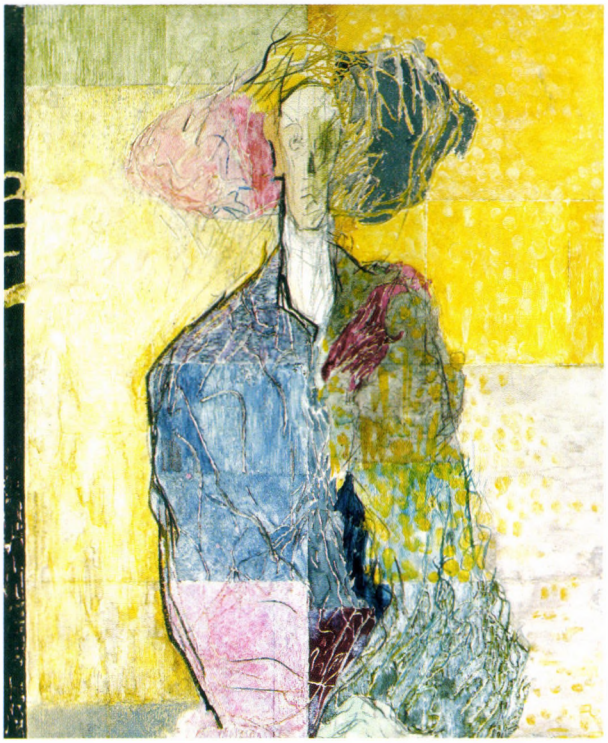
Ilka Gedő: *Kitchen Window in Puschino II,* 1976. Pencil, watercolours and opaque paint on paper, 72.5 x 42.5 cm.
Private collection.



Ilka Gedő: *Rose Garden with a Triangular Window,* 1979–1980. Oil on canvas, 50 x 55 cm.
Private collection.

Ilka Gedő: *Artificial Flower with a Grey Background,* 1980–81.
Oil on canvas, 47 x 57 cm. Private collection.





Ilka Gedő: *Self-Portrait with a Straw Hat,* 1984.
Oil on photographic paper laid down on canvas, 60 x 48.5 cm.
Private collection.

Ilka Gedő: *Double Self-Portrait,* 1985. Oil on photographic paper laid down on canvas, 58 x 42 cm.
Private collection.

all smudged, and really hideously printed.
The family just looked and shrugged their shoulders,
repeating: "plenty of material there."
The cast-iron locomotive was hellishly heavy,
and, naturally, derailed on every curve.
A violent thing, a Soviet Union thing, it knew
no small gradations. It stood still or raced;
smashed things, or rolled over like a dying bug.
I couldn't find a brake, of course. Even my
big brothers' German train-set didn't have that.
Unnerved, I chose to just push it around by hand,
pondering all the while on global politics.

Phantom Image

Fantomkép

God, I've got no idea if he was wearing glasses,
how narrow or how wide the space between his eyes was.
I conjure, looking back, the smell his clothes gave out.
(Where did he even come from? He didn't wear a coat.)
I still quite well retain the voice, the way he talked,
how, going out the door, he slightly bent his back.
The image flees like water, squeaks into the outflow;
I'm noting for the record the facts one really must know.
I speak them like a rosary, but soon I'll break this picture.
Was his mouth smiling on the left side, or just twisted?
Note well: That's "left" as a theater audience sees it.
My brain is now directing—and constantly deceiving,
because all I can see now is a portly "yes"—
the middle of his back, when finally he left.

The Antarctic Wilderness

Az antarktiszi hósivatag

Nobody who was mine has been seduced away.
They've simply passed by, like a block of soldiers.
I stood there, while they shrank into a dot.
And so I formulated this perturbing—
although unfounded, obviously—opinion:

that anyone who leaves me, through that act,
leaves off loving itself. They travel out
to the Antarctic wilderness, devoid
of love; move into freezing icy purity;
and henceforth their existence takes a form
like that of penguins. In the midst of masses,
they elegantly loiter, quite alone.

Well Practised

Jó rutinosan

The one who knows me most— who is almost
my trusted friend—still turns up here and there;
with three days' beard, with bad breath, he comes close,
leans toward me, holds out a questing hand.
He knows I'd like to bury that intimate
relationship we had (almost attempt
at love): bury it deep, definitively.
I give. Always for one last time, I give.
The world can see, from how he sits beside me,
that I have had him, and that he's had me;
from how he hovers round me, slobbers in his
well practised way, and fusses round, it's clear:
Mendacity itself has held me close.

Mónika Mesterházi

Poems

Translated by David Hill

You Inverted

Fordítottja volt

And I might even say that I was scared,
unsettled by your face's inverted asymmetry
glimpsed in the mirror, like the twisting round of a certainty;
so I looked elsewhere. It was you inverted, almost
like saying hi to the wrong twin. And I suppose
I didn't want to deal with any such contingency.

You're Free

Szabad vagy

Where do you return from, soul, even in one evening?
For I see you seeking your place, startled, among walls,
bed, window, ceiling, whose evolved
order is alien around you. And what are you telling
consciousness, when you wake it up in dead of night?
You keep the tired body from sleeping.
If you're not happy here, perpetual drifter,
give more intelligible signs. Because it's you
alone who are free. Just make it known, for you're affected, too.

Mónika Mesterházi
is a poet and translator. She wrote her PhD dissertation on Northern Irish poetry, taught for years in secondary schools and now writes full time. She has published three volumes of poems as well as translations of British and American poetry and selections from the diaries of Katherine Mansfield.

Old Address Book

Öreg notesz

I wish my old address book were still good.
Its pages as they were, not falling out,
and all those former names still mine to call.

Its cover in one piece, a crimson red,
holding itself together, like this green one.
I wish my old address book were still good.

And fading faces could be seen in full.
Less of the doctors, fewer offices,
and all those former names still mine to call.

In writing that is not too smudged to read,
the dear ones who have died would be right there.
I wish my old address book were still good.

Important ones, with hearts not yet grown cold,
would play important roles within that book,
and all those former names still mine to call.

That notebook's pattern, patchwork it was called,
friendly and cheerful, just the way it stood.
I wish my old address book were still good,
and all those former names still mine to call.

Light

A fény

Instead of seeing things as light sees,
I see the spectacle of light. The objective
vector of truth is warped by
the subjective mass that draws it in,
bends it toward itself without knowing.
And I can imagine calculations which I'm
not up to understanding, ones that would
let me see things rightfully, which from one
angle seem just, from another unjustified;
from one angle strong, from another high-handed;
from one, sensitivity, from another, just pretence.
Instead of seeing things as light sees ...

But then, if I saw things as light sees,
would I see through the living flesh
to the bones, the deformities and tumors?
Behind spiritual torments would I spy
impetuously rushing hormones?
Instead of a broken face, could I read
a life's map, its system of causalities?
If I saw things as light sees ...

And yet, if I saw things as light sees,
everything from all angles, without bias,
how could I live among humans,
who make mistakes, nurse disappointments, hopes?
How could my matter anything but light be?

The Door

Az ajtó

Your knocking's useless. But you can hear
that somebody is in. Or, anyway,
there's something audible, a swishing.
On the other side of the closed door,
the window's open and the rain pelts down.

On Trash

A szemétről

1.

Bent double, I crawl round behind the hoover,
and grip its split pipe, holding it together.
Meanwhile, its motor, at the back, unharmed,
sprays dust in all directions at full power.
But the phenomenon, how do I know it?
I ponder on this, while a rivulet
of instant glue runs along three of my fingers.
And then, there it is. Nothing going in?
And just a tireless dust-storm coming out?
And what sucks big-time is my situation?
My revenues and my expenditures.

2.

I never thought I'd be gluing together
a broken hoover pipe, a broken instant,
and yet, before I throw something away,
I always try my damnedest to repair it,
to keep the chaos that prevails around me.
I try to use it for a little longer
if possible, because I know what happens
to the things that end up in the trash.

3.

They end up in the trash, yet stay behind:
an awkward memory and atomic waste,
and homeless people thrown out on the street,
dead bodies in the river, ashes in the air,
and, hanging on the conscience, unknown sins,
believed to have been disowned, anxiety
thought to have been drugged out, disowned. They greet me,
they're fine, thanks, clearly labeled, all completely
unchanged in form, and inaccessible.

4.

So should all things remain just as they've been?
Should I avoid touching the vanished ages'
objects, their wounded feelings, their routines?
And should I be enveloped by the useless?
For the body and the conscious mind throw out
what isn't needed. So does even the spirit.

But if they just throw out, they cease to be.

5.

One must inspect things in this world, give them a kneading,
chew on them, or at least digest them as
we wiggle through, like earthworms. Or at least
compost them, find a new use for them.
I cannot simply throw away whole years.
I won't preserve my every self-deceit.
There's nothing for it: I must make the best
of what I have. And hope it makes some sense.

Géza Perneczky

In the Rose Garden

Ilka Gedő 1921–1985—A Retrospective at the Hungarian National Gallery, 18 November 2004–31 March 2004
István Hajdu and Dávid Bíró:
The Art of Ilka Gedő (1921–1985). Budapest, Gondolat, 2003, 256 pp.

After an interval of ten years, I started taking trips home to Hungary in 1980. I was immediately drawn to Székesfehérvár, where Ilka Gedő's first retrospective was on show.

I could hardly have been more surprised. It was as if a gingerbread maker who had until then been working in secret had suddenly opened wide the doors of her shop: the walls were speckled with scraps of petals embedded in honeycake, gardens flattened with a rolling-pin, woman friends, roses and convolvulus pressed into mementoes, clowns covered with curling leaves. All these were not large, seeking to impress, but the whole exhibition was like the foliage of trees just before they start to shed their leaves. This is the season when Nature reveals more of her anatomy: as if nipped by frost, pigments stand out on surfaces, trees break up into mosaics, the boundaries of colours take on an inimitable complexity. Deep wrinkles, folds seeking a more comfortable position; elsewhere a splash of sandy deserts glimmers—the light of pilfered mirrors perhaps? And, fittingly for the work of a woman entering her riper years, the colour harmony suggests that it had been a dry summer.

The planes of the pictures here resembled sands born of purple glory, there a worn leather binding holding sheets made from the scales of butterflies. Vaguely discernible behind them seemed to be a dazzling phantasm. Here there was an elegy set in a narrow frame, possibly a few evanescent lines of Rilke's. Elsewhere, acrobatics set in a grid of lines, and a frolicking horde of Klee's hobgoblins with their indecipherable tangle of matted hair, or dishevelled Art Nouveau witches. And then a crack in the wall. If one looked at it for long enough, one could see in it an Ariel trying to conjour out what bravado is.

Géza Perneczky
is an art historian who left Hungary in the 1950s and made his home in Cologne, Germany, where he became a secondary school teacher. He frequently contributes essays and short stories to Hungarian journals.

He casts a spell, plays with rhymes and taps with his wand; yes, in an ecstasy of joy he lashes the bushes into veritable fairy-chaff.

So who was Ilka Gedő?

Behind her fairytale colourfulness and lyricism is a childhood that had been rich in intellectual stimuli. She was born in 1921, her father taught at the Jewish *gimnázium* in Budapest, and some of the leading writers and artists of the time were among the family's circle of friends. This childhood ended in the growing shadow of the Second World War. The young woman was herded into the city's Ghetto, and that was where she matured as an artist. Her drawings (until then no more than studies) captured with unexpected vigour the faces and figures in the Ghetto—captured the apathy, fear and helplessness that lurked behind them. These drawings, mainly in pencil, may also be interpreted as portraits and figurative sketches, they have no narrative content, only an intellectual dimension, only a feel that communicates the horror.

In 1946 Ilka Gedő married Endre Bíró, a biochemist of literary bent, and they spent longish periods in Paris and the Soviet Union. The horizon of postwar Budapest soon again darkened with the onset of Hungary's Stalinist era. In the visual arts, the key figures were the members of the European School, which had revived after the war only to be soon driven back underground, whilst in broader intellectual life, in close personal contact with the artists of the European School, a friendly circle of philosophers and aesthetes gathered around Lajos Szabó, Béla Tábor and Árpád Mezei, among them Attila Kotányi, who was to move to Paris after the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and there became a member of the Situationists' Internationale. The predominant taste in this small circle was delineated by surrealist doctrines, with an admixture of calligraphic exploration, and an espousal of extreme abstraction. Among their Hungarian-born predecessors was Lajos Vajda, the shining star of the 1930s, who died prematurely on forced-labour service. Vajda too had ended up painting non-figurative compositions and he had near-iconic status for these artists.

It was in this artistic environment that Ilka Gedő was showing her drawings, indeed: not abstract enough, too naturalistic. Actually, as the late Júlia Szabó pointed out in the catalogue for the Székesfehérvár exhibition, the Giacomettiesque expressive drawings date to before the time Giacometti had embarked on his existentialist period. In his essay in this volume, István Hajdu sees an affinity with Munch, or the no less ecstatic Antonin Artaud, as being important too.

Ilka Gedő faced a crisis. All her instincts and her way of seeing things demanded that she remain true to the manner of depicting feelings and passions which she had embodied in her figurative drawings, which she personally felt to be a totality and the legacy of Van Gogh. However, the attitudes of the friends around her were far more radical (indeed esoteric). They thought she was old-fashioned. Ilka Gedő resigned herself, and in 1949 she gave up working in the visual arts, only resuming painting and drawing after a silence of sixteen years.

The intervening years were taken up with studying colour theory and translating various theoretical works. She translated, and indeed supplied tiny illustrations for, the papers that Newton, Goethe and Ostwald had written on the theory of colour, and later did likewise for Eber's *Das Wort und die geistigen Realitäten*. She was not content to leave it at the purely theoretical level: she devised and executed hundreds and thousands of colour tables of differing character or mood—a journey into the realm of the rainbow-hued refractions of light that extended over many years (though one should not dismiss the thought that these "scientific" colour essays are, in many cases, poised on the brink of becoming paintings in their own right). That is how we see those years today: she was again acting instinctively, gaining the knowledge through which she could turn herself into a superb colourist.

By the time the external pressures had diminished, and the cult of the extreme abstractionist authorities was over, it was possible for the cycle of Ilka Gedő's oil paintings to begin.

After the first important show in 1980 in Székesfehérvár Ilka Gedő had one more exhibition, at the Dorottya Street Gallery in Budapest. In the year of her death in 1985, she was commemorated with a one-woman show at the gallery of the Szentendre artists' colony; her painings also featured that year in the Hungarian Cultural Weeks held in Glasgow. Two years later, in 1987, the Műcsarnok (Palace of Exhibitions) in Budapest gave her a retrospective. Another interlude and the Janos Gat Gallery in New York mounted Ilka Gedő exhibitions in 1994 and 1997, and her work was included in a collective show three years later in 2000.

There is no space here to list all her shows. Many of her works passed into public hands; in addition to the Székesfehérvár Museum and the Budapest National Gallery, various foreign collections acquired them, among them the New York Jewish Museum, the Yad Vashem Art Museum and Israel Museum in Jerusalem, as well as the British Museum and the Düsseldorf Kunstmuseum. The 1944–45 Ghetto drawings and the slightly later self-portraits have proved most in demand, with some entire series finding new owners. Foremost among the reviews and catalogue publications that accompanied the various exhibitions was a volume of essays by Péter György, Gábor Pataki, Júlia Szabó and Ferenc Mészáros that the *Új Művészet* imprint put together for publication in 1997. All in all, these shows and purchases, along with the associated recollections and analyses, have meant that Ilka Gedő's name has now started to gain a wider currency.

The new large-format album on Ilka Gedő was published in lieu of a catalogue, as it were, to prepare and accompany the long-awaited exhibition mounted by the Hungarian National Gallery in Budapest. Also, it was meant to replace what, to date, have been merely fragmentary impressions with a more clear-cut synopsis; besides reprinting key documents, it includes lists of the sketchbooks and notebooks that the artist left behind. In addition, the book contains what is, for

all practical purposes, a complete survey of her oil paintings—the most approachable of the genres from the viewpoint of the general public. This itself is a major step forward, given that before now not one institution or publisher had ventured to survey the entire oeuvre. Indeed the book is the fruit of a private initiative, only made possible through the work done by the artist's son, Dávid Bíró, in assembling the lists of works and references as well as drumming up the funding for the high-quality reproductions the book is packed with, courtesy of the Eper Grafikai Stúdió. Hajdu's essay is accompanied by the archive material that is in the family's possession (various writings, diaries, notes and lists of works). All in all, this makes a multi-layered guide that will be indispensable for all future studies, as well as providing a background for the one hundred and fifty colour reproductions that have been made of Ilka Gedő's oil paintings. It is particularly laudable that Hungarian and English-language versions of the book have been printed separately, rather than producing a bilingual edition, and that the scholarly apparatus of the Hungarian version also includes English glosses on the most essential information.

At the first opening of the book, it is clear that its primary (and legitimate) purpose is to present the paintings. Given that the principal message is the colour values of the paintings, my only remark is that in some cases these are a little too vivid, even strident: anyone who has seen the originals knows that Ilka Gedő was a master of restrained surfaces and tones on the darker side of the palette. Having said that, I would like to add the minor comment that it is a matter of personal regret that space could not be found, alongside this imposing gallery of oil paintings, for the reader to be treated to the no less valuable drawings in similar plenitude and quality (possibly in full colour).

Indeed, the further you turn the pages of the volume, the greater your curiosity to know the diverse "other" genres that are referred to merely in the form of lists. Over the decades, Ilka Gedő's studio became a repository for "secondary materials" of the most fantastic forms and contents, and I am quite sure that all this material, attesting as it does to a rare absorption and, at times, inventiveness or playfulness, still holds many surprises.

Two names appear on the book's title page, those of István Hajdu and Dávid Bíró; a third should rightly share the credits: the artist's husband, Endre Bíró. I am not aware to what extent earlier publications produced for particular occasions utilised the notes and recollections on his wife's work; here, at all events, two such writings ("Ilka Gedő's Studio as It Was at the Time of Her Death", and "Note on Ilka Gedő's Working Life") are highly significant in both their content and length, and in no way inferior to the essay by Hajdu, the highlighted feature of the text.

For their extraordinary modesty and fidelity to their subject, these two documents by Endre Bíró are unique indeed. Writings by the spouses of "dead artists", rarely stop the readers in their tracks, supplying a warning like: "The

facts about Lajos Szabó and 'his circle' as recorded here contain things that were experienced and interpreted, and misinterpreted, by the writer of these lines. They may not be applied to any other context without checking and independent confirmation..." What follows is informative, accurate, and yet still enjoyably rounded. One would need to be quick on one's feet indeed to be able to locate any misinterpretation worth mentioning.

With the mention of Lajos Szabó's name we have plunged into the—I almost said metaphysical—tumult, but instead will make do with the clamorous thick of the world in which Ilka Gedő moved. After his wife's death, Endre Bíró took stock of the seemingly endless slips and scraps of paper, newspaper cuttings and postcards, prints and paper toys, miniature bottles, broken-off twigs, remnant tubes of paint or pages ripped from books, and supplied each and every item with a few lines of commentary on its intrinsic or biographical significance. Quite spontaneously, I started reading this text as if it had some literary kinship to one of Georges Perec's writings or, say, Hrabal's *Dancing Lessons for the Advanced in Age.* The further one delves into the inventory, the more significant and perplexing each single addition seems. This is a virtuoso scholarly feat, worthy of a great natural scientist.

Just as modestly groomed but steeply raked in its perspective is the second essay, dealing with Ilka Gedő's artistic career (with footnotes disproportionately longer than the text). Into this Biró crams all those thoughts that he felt were either personal or whose contents, by extending beyond the person of Ilka Gedő, strictly speaking stepped outside the framework adumbrated by the title. That is why they are being passed on, as if in an undertone, in columns of small print. Reading this or that interminable footnote one feels it is closer in spirit to the essay than the main text itself. On the way, Bíró has many fascinating things to relate about his wife.

The precise descriptions that he gives of her method of building up layers of paint, for instance, are most instructive, since with this knowledge it is easier to reconstruct how the iridescent, deceptive surfaces of her canvases, which bring to mind translucent lamellae or the concretions of sea shells, were contrived. Even more important, of course, is the testimony borne to the stations and trials through which the artist passed, as observed and recorded by Endre Bíró. One instance concerns the question of why Ilka Gedő gave up art around 1948–49. Was it due to some personal crisis, or because that was when her children were born, or was she paralysed by the failure of the circle of friends around her to understand her? Or might it have been because external pressures—and remember, we are speaking about the period just before 1950—had intensified to the point that they became unbearable? In Endre Bíró's view, Ilka was unnerved on being confronted with the norms set up by the circle around Lajos Szabó and Béla Tábor and on perceiving the significance of Lajos Vajda's late abstract

period, which debates within the circle had raised to the status of a guiding principle. As a result, she lost her faith in "drawing after nature": she laid down her pencil because she believed that was the only way in which she could be creative. Elsewhere Bíró informs us that Ilka's appetite for art was perhaps taken away by the opinions that Lajos Szabó had formed (partly under the influence of the Vienna psychiatrist Otto Weininger) and which he did not bother hiding, about "women's place in the intellectual world".

By then, Ilka Gedő had already produced the series of drawings that major international collections are now so keen to lay their hands on, and over which there has for some time been an ongoing discussion. Does the concentration that is the essence of the figures really presage a transformation towards the spiritual comparable to Giacometti's, or did the artist use some other refined stylisation and transmutation to capture these singularly tension-fraught transcendences? And now we have it: she herself believed that the drawings were merely "copied" from nature. Her sole consideration was to be true to life. As to the stilling of her activity, I shall later venture an explanation that perhaps assigns less weight to the incomprehension of the friends around her; for now let it suffice to say in regard to the core question that she may well have felt that the revered figure of Van Gogh was standing behind her whilst she was drawing—and he was the source of her inspiration. Her appetite for work was subsequently taken away by the proliferation of a thicket of directional posts and prohibitory signs.

What is clear from Bíró's lines is that the husband strove to remain discreet, how else was an esteemed scientist at the Szent-Györgyi Albert Institute supposed to "relate" to an issue so fraught with subjective problems? He has more to say, on the other hand, about the role of automatism, and Ilka Gedő's ambivalent attitude towards the technique, as Lajos Szabó, for example, accepted its importance but denied it had any role in his own work. Bíró describes the path by which Ilka Gedő, when she resumed work around 1968 by drawing "portraits" of family members or acquaintances (the quotations marks are warranted because these were completely free studies that, even allowing for their being sketches, are not modelled on human body forms), found herself close to total abstraction. According to him, what happened is that whilst doodling she would be thinking intently about the subject in question but simultaneously trying *not* to draw from memory.

In essence, this semi-automatic or, as Bíró aptly denotes it, pantomimic mode of representation subsequently became the near-exclusive method of her entire second artistic period, of the oil paintings that she produced from 1966-68 until her death.

On the occasion of the 1985 commemorative exhibition at Szentendre, the playwright and novelist György Spiró wrote for the catalogue on "The ever-alert manualism of the non-observer", which is both more and less than automatism. István Hajdu, in his essay, perceptively introduces and analyses the

pre-1950 drawings, which he personally (and perhaps Ilka Gedő herself) regards as "...individually fashioned yet universally valid theological messages..." In dealing with the oil paintings that were painted twenty years later he discerns a completely different Ilka Gedő. He concludes that in this second period, largely given over to oils, she now saw painting as "the most important end, and also the most important means, of what was rather a playful, auto-mythological and also verbally marked internally conducted dialogue." This can no longer be the intuitive alertness of a non-observer, nor the creative scrawls of a pantomime's semi-wakefulness; these are now supplanted by the mechanism of self-reflexiveness, the fairytale world of an artist with her own phantasms, drawn from within herself and for her own amusement. A form of *l'art pour l'art* fantasising.

It can be sensed what an essential difference this is. Hajdu divides Ilka Gedő's career in two stylistically, he also sets the two periods on the scales morally as well, and one may be left with a distinct impression that this assessment ends up with Hajdu denying the second, oil-painting period any possible form of relationship with universal functions. How could paintings be truly significant if they are "verbally marked" or "auto-mythological" and serve simultaneously as both end and means in a "dialogue process", or self-serving games, as defined by such terms.

Perhaps what Hajdu is trying to say is that in this second period Ilka Gedő no longer believed there could be any transcendental values, that she (and only she) in that specific time and place would be able to formulate successfully through her particular means. Instead, she constructed a puppet theatre in which she set those repeatedly overpainted, fraying flowers or coloured dolls dancing for her own entertainment. (Hajdu is possibly referring to this when he reminds us that Ilka Gedő often (indeed too often) called her pictorial motifs "artificial flowers". To call something "artificial" is tantamount to saying it is "mock"; so mock art would be something one creates with mock flowers. If that supposition is correct, then it may also be true that Ilka Gedő saw herself in the same way as Hajdu now sees her...) The fact that she painted them beautifully is quite another matter. For what does the beauty of the fairytale world that revolves around her count for, if it is such that ends and means merge so closely within it? If it is true that this type of painting neither accuses nor glorifies, neither crumbles to dust nor truly soars on high, then it is at best decorative rather than transcendental. And it can only attain "ethereal" heights: in other words, it can be aesthetic, but not redemptive.

But let me go to the heart of what I want to say. On reading the book, I had the impression that Hajdu's essay is based on a story of catharsis; it seeks to register a complaint about the failure of this catharsis to gain wider currency in Hungarian art. The tragedy that makes the catharsis necessary was the persecution of the Jews that came to a culmination in the final years of the Second World War; its possible epic material comprises the efforts (and any successes) of those thinkers and artists who are sensible to and relive the problem, and eventually attempt to

portray it—or if the attempts largely failed, then a description of those failures.

The two artistic climaxes in Ilka Gedő's career more or less coincide with the two periods of accepting that troubled heritage and of being resigned to finding no genuine solution (perceptible at the time right across Europe). The large distance in time between these two periods, which she experienced as a crisis (roughly the years from 1948 to 1968) correspond with what might be characterised as the years of experimentation in which artists were still clinging to the classical avant-garde and seeking a path forward even as they were increasingly obliged to recognise that the path was overtrodden and was not going to help a new Picasso, and thus a new *Guernica,* come into the world. It seems highly indicative that this same weakness, hesitancy or failure, was manifest throughout postwar Europe as it was in Hungary—at best in more familiar settings and on a much larger scale.

(One may add parenthetically that Paris was still a beacon for the continent, though that beacon had long ceased to be the Belle Époque. Life no longer moved within the domains of the Bois de Boulogne, Montparnasse and Montmartre; the city recovered only gradually from the postwar ordure and troubles. Figuratively, if not literally, its streets stank of urine, and the stucco of its houses had grown black with age: one only has to think of the sensation that was caused when a start was made on cleaning up the façades of public buildings. Western Europe spent little time lingering in Proust's gardens; in his place the busy, ant-like figure of Sartre bestrode the pavements, whilst Yves Montand and Juliette Greco became the idols of intellectuals. On both sides of the Iron Curtain, the privileged well-off collected the records of Yma Sumac—a startling hand-in-hand consonance! Brisk gusts now swept in, not down the pitted roads, but from the North African coast, courtesy of Camus, or whistled under the door as a frigid Viking legacy, thanks to Beckett. That relatively protracted spell, during which all of Europe waited for Godot, lasted up till the events of 1968 in Prague and Paris, after which the scenery was finally rearranged. True, there had already been harbingers of this change: in the early 1960s Rauschenberg carried off the Grand Prix at the Venice Biennale, the first slap in the face by the New York School; Alberto Giacometti shifted his abode from Alpine valleys to a tiny bedsit in Paris; and Yves Klein discovered how blue the sky was and learned how to launch into flight from the rooftops.)

When Endre Bíró first met Ilka Gedő he had the impression that the young woman was still completely under her mother's influence, a sentimental creature who could only react to her sufferings with romantic or affronted gestures; who whilst loathing the evils she had lived through, indeed forming what was perhaps an unduly mythical image of the atrocities, was nevertheless incapable of any analytical or polemical engagement. Within a few years, however, Ilka too had become a member of the intellectual circle in which Bíró had long

been at home, learning to read books on philosophy and aesthetics, translating "banned" texts, and arguing about the problems of abstract art, though there are countless indications in her notes and sketches that she did not feel these were truly her own concerns, indeed sometimes found the denizens of the faded décor of Budapest's mini-Montparnasse to be hysterical or snobbish.

On her attaining the heights of this slowly accumulated erudition and critical acumen, and using it as a rock from which to dive and on which to cling (I could say: at the fever pitch of the crisis induced by this realisation), came an essay on Vajda that she wrote in 1954 as a lengthy and highly instructive open letter to the art historian and poet Stefánia Mándy. In this she took issue with the norms that had been set up around the European School, such as its doctrine of the alleged or genuine necessity of "catacomb art", or the orthodoxy of dogmatic abstraction. Longing to escape the artistic ghetto she had come to know in Budapest, she sought the outlines of a more total way of painting—one that, for instance, summated Van Gogh, Picasso, Vajda and Klee and also admitted and inhaled more deeply the air of the world of the Old Masters. But was art of this kind still possible at all by then—in 1954, she agonised? And if so, how? Ilka Gedő desperately addressed these questions to the authorities of the European School, and it is noteworthy how much emphasis the text gives to the expression "cramping-up". The essay, one of the outstanding documents in Hungarian art history of the years between 1948 and 1956, is included in the book.

By then, Ilka Gedő had not been drawing for a good few years, and it was to be a further decade and more before she took a brush in her hand. It was a long night—of renouncing catharsis. The era bids farewell to the illusion that there might be hope of a solution through the tools of art. The recognition that the path that until then had been regarded as negotiable (to put it another way, the further pursuit of classical modernism) could only lead towards a cramping-up, or merely add to the sterile waste-tip of epigonism. Ilka Gedő too was one of those for whom a glimpse of this cul-de-sac signalled an order to halt. To be sure, it would not have been as dramatic, or as radical, as this suggests; equally, there may well have been other reasons—personal or family considerations, for instance—for falling silent. Yet looking back from a perspective of half a century, one cannot help feeling that it was some major ethical impulse that led her to lay down her pencil. In her own way, quite unconsciously and naively, yet autonomously, she had already once before, during the 1940s come very close to the tone of the longed-for synthesis, perhaps also (it cannot be excluded) to a possible continuation of the trajectory from Van Gogh to Vajda. At one point Hajdu, very perceptively, mentions Francis Bacon as showing certain affinities to Ilka Gedő's early drawings. But Bacon is truly the protagonist of a subsequent chapter, as far beyond her generation as the distance separating the little Hungarian Montparnasse from the dam burst that occurred in Hungary in the late 1960s to produce the Iparterv group from some lower depth. Neither the

artists clustered around the European School nor more independent spirits like Ilka Gedő knew what to make of the opportunities that opened up with this new era, for it marked the setting-off on open tracks of a train, still rattling on to this day, on which we ourselves are seated.

Which brings me to my conclusion. I feel that Ilka Gedő's withdrawal was an act that was made within the artistic arena. On reaching a point beyond which the sole paths open to her lay in the direction of sterile planning or the proliferation of copycats, she turned away and fell silent, because that was the only way she could remain true to herself and to the world of her earlier drawings. Plainly, she did not do so with premeditated intent, and quite certainly she can have had no inkling of the wider context. She remained as blind in doing so as she had been in producing her drawings with closed eyes, for only the fearlessness of an *idiot savant* can explain how she was able to balance so masterfully over yawning chasms. By their nature, of course, accomplishments like that can have no direct influence; the message that they impart only arrives at its addressees much later. Ilka Gedő's unpainted pictures, which are lined up under the alcoves of the years from 1950 to 1968, are phantom pictures, shades that would first become visible only after decades had passed.

I am aware of just one other gesture in Hungarian art of those years that is comparable to her "stepping aside": that was the pit Béla Veszelszky dug in the garden of his house on Budapest's Rose Hill and into which he withdrew with a humility comparable to Ilka Gedő's resignation. Veszelszky's "observatory" was a funnel-shaped hole that pointed towards the heavens like a telescope. What the artist saw from down there brought about a totally new approach in his art.

Where, then, are we to place the mutedly lit fairytale world of the late oil paintings? In answer, I turn to another story as my starting-point.

Some time ago, as luck would have it, I got into a discussion with Zsuzsa Szenes about textile art in Hungary during the 1960s. She recalled that back then I had written a fairly lengthy piece, "Subterranean Streams", about a group of women—most of them the wives of architects—who had given the genre such an unexpected push into prominence. Hungary's political leadership in those days kept applied artists on a much looser leash, and they took full advantage of the opportunities that this offered. It was potters (Lívia Gorka, for example) who were perhaps the first in Hungary to make this new fashion presentable by announcing, with disarming frankness, that they were, to be sure, in a distant sense abstract artists, and before long a whole army of tapestry-weaving women and textile artists, working with carding cotton, woollen yarn and other coloured stuffs, were emulating their example. To this day, whenever I take a 56 tram along Szilágyi Erzsébet Alley in Buda and see, resplendent in its tulip colours, the sentry-box standing by the gates of the Zrínyi Military Academy, I am reminded of the similarly shaped three-dimensional appliqué works of Zsuzsa

Szenes entitled *This Is How Hungarians Like It,* or *A Chapter from the Aristophanes Adaptation "Long Live Háry János".* And I can almost hear the ringing, healthy peels of laughter with which those conceptual textile artists stole the thunder of pontificating males with their disputatious dispositions.

Zsuzsa Szenes claimed that back then, in the Sixties, I too had paid a visit on their Mecca, the artists' colony at the village of Velem, from which the textile art biennale at nearby Szombathely later emerged. When I said I was truly sorry but I had no recollection of that, Zsuzsa just shook her head: "And what about the cedar of Lebanon standing there, and the sweet chestnut?" She could not believe that such key details could have been erased from my memory. It emerged later that since the Velem colony only began to function during the 1970s, there really was no chance that I had visited it in the previous decade, but that is beside the point. What matters is that in their world women have other mental maps—not maps on which names, trends and political programmes (least of all prohibitions) are printed but sweet chestnuts, cedars and arbours of blooming (albeit possibly thorny) rose-bushes. Those are the truths by which they regulate their own lives as well. They maintain surreptitious contacts with one another and with these living, unstoppably growing organic beings. If men happen to come by with their theories, the women just smile forgivingly, for they are well aware what their business is: life must carry on, whatever may have happened, for the fate of generations to come is in their hands.

Ilka Gedő was one such woman. When the 1960s arrived and that gradual but unstoppable flow of subterranean streams commenced, with the result that the overlying rocks began to crack under the pressure and the life-sustaining moisture to seep out onto drought-plagued land, she too started to paint. Flowers—or "artificial flowers" as she called them with quiet self-irony. Part of her extant legacy comprises 128 notebooks containing sketches and notes made whilst she was painting the oils, as well as another 157 notebooks of other texts, including a diary and various notes discussing artistic matters. A plethora of fascinating messages that pass on Ilka Gedő's thoughts still await discovery in this archival material.

Until then, though, we have the pictures. As if a gingerbread maker working in secret had suddenly opened wide the doors to her shop: scraps of petals embedded in honey-cake confections, or gardens flattened with a rolling-pin, roses and convolvulus pressed as mementoes, curling leaves, flowers... ❧

Parallel Lives

Günther Grass and Imre Kertész in Conversation with György Dalos

György Dalos: *Here I am with two of the great witnesses of the twentieth century. There are just two years between them, Günther Grass was born in 1927 and Imre Kertész in 1929. There were times when they were effectively light years apart, but there were also times when they came ever closer together, their paths finally crossing, fatefully one might say, at the Swedish Academy or, perhaps better, in that German intellectual milieu which defined both their careers and on whose course they in turn have exerted an influence. In 1944, Günther Grass was 17, Germany's minister for propaganda was speaking about miracle weapons and the Führer was sending secondary-school boys off to the fronting line. That was how Günther Grass found himself actively involved in the war. Could you speak a little about that, I wonder?*

Günther Grass: I think our biographies, at least as far as our younger years are concerned, could hardly have been more different. I was a member of the Hitler Youth from the age of ten, and up until the end of the war I grew up totally in that ideology. What I mean is I believed in it. I even ended up becoming a soldier. I was wounded in Berlin, and went from military hospital into captivity as an American PoW. When I was then confronted with the crimes for which the Germans were responsible, I was unwilling to give those facts any credence at first. I could not imagine how such inhumanities could have been committed by Germans. Accepting that great guilt was a long and drawn-out process. In point of fact, it is a process that continues to the present; because down to the present day we have still not found a valid answer to the question of how all this could

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György Dalos

is a Hungarian novelist and poet. Harassed and not allowed to publish he left Hungary in 1987 and now lives in Berlin. Between 1995–99 he was Head of the Hungarian Cultural Institute in Berlin. Of his novels, all of them translated into German, The Circumcision *(1991) and* The Guest from the Future: Anna Akhmatova and Isaiah Berlin *(2002) have appeared in English.*

have happened in a civilised country. That has also determined my work as a writer. When later on, much later on, writing came to the forefront of my artistic development—bear in mind, I initially wanted to be a sculptor and graphic artist, but—I came to realise after a while that artistic inclinations alone were not enough. I came to realise that certain topics relating to Germany's past are laid down for me and my generation, they cannot be ducked, but that too was a slow and protracted process. To begin with I tried to find myself through poetry, but it was also a political development. The pure chance of falling into American and not Russian hands as a PoW played a large part in that. When I was released from captivity, I also had to change my political world view. I recollect that at the age of eighteen I worked in a mine, a potash mine, 950 metres underground, because that qualified me for a heavy-labour ration card, we were better fed. Back in those days there were frequent power cuts, and during a power cut it was impossible to carry on working. The other workers, who were all older than me, would start arguing. There would be essentially three groups quarreling with one another. One lot were the Communists, the second were the petty Nazis, and the third group were more or less Social Democrats. I very quickly noticed that in these arguments the Communists and petty Nazis would gang up on the Social Democrats. That was an early impression of the first order and also an object lesson on the fall of the Weimar Republic. That's all I would want to say to start with. My evolution, then, was very extreme—the opposite to yours [addressing Imre Kertész]. Literature did bring us together later on, though.

György Dalos: *In 1945, still a child, Imre Kertész returned home from a concentration camp to find a Hungary that was progressing toward something. Unlike Gyuri Köves, the protagonist of the novel* Fatelessness, *it appears he believed and trusted in something. What, more precisely, could have been the nature of that hope for Imre Kertész in 1945–46?*

Imre Kertész: I would start earlier than that, because I too fell into American captivity, albeit in quotes. At the time Mr Grass became an American prisoner of war, I was being liberated by the Americans in Buchenwald concentration camp near Weimar. As to what that hope was—amazingly it was socialism, though it was not all that significant as far as I was concerned: what interested me, let us say, was life. So after the concentration camp you could say I threw myself into life, in a living Budapest, which at that time, between 1945 and 1948, was a very interesting place. That was what was called the "coalition era", when it still looked as though Hungary might turn itself into a democracy. But the more far-sighted—because of course you have pessimists and optimists, and of the two the pessimists are the better informed—anyway, the pessimists started to leave the country, and they were quite amazed that anyone at all was left behind, because they could see that Stalin was going to lay hands on the country and they knew what that would mean. So, as I said, hope meant socialism for me,

and at the age of sixteen I joined the Communist Party. I already had cause to regret that by 1949, but by then there was no way of backing out. As is recorded in several of my autobiographical writings, I started working at a newspaper, but I was kicked out fairly soon, and that was for the following reason. I was supposed to write an article that featured Comrade Rákosi, and there were three obligatory epithets that had to be bestowed on Comrade Rákosi: the great leader of our people, Stalin's best Hungarian disciple, or whatever, and a third. The secretary who typed up the articles in the office was sitting at her typewriter, and I was only able to dictate two of the epithets and got stuck on the third. The third simply wouldn't come to mind, and I knew that was it for me. And indeed that's what happened. Short and simple: I was kicked off the paper.

Gy.D. ◆ *It's perfectly easy to see that someone would return to this country and want something better, and would see the future as lying with socialism. That is understandable, even joining the Party, but then what happened, of course, was that a democracy became a people's democracy, and the difference between the two, as the wits had it, is that between a jacket and a straitjacket. So, when that straitjacket came into being, how was it possible to make jokes, live, get about? What sort of thoughts did you have about where your career was taking you? Did you want a career?*

I.K. ◆ No, I didn't want a career. That's exactly the point. I didn't have a clue what was happening to me, unlike Mr Grass, who had a clear direction marked out as he wanted to be an artist. I didn't, except for wanting to be a journalist to start with, but then around the end of 1948 and the beginning of 1949 I came to see that I couldn't be a journalist—and, indeed, they kicked me off the paper. I worked in a factory, and I wrote pieces for radio: that was the fashionable thing back then—light entertainment programmes. It was actually around 1954–55 that I began to become aware of what had happened and was happening to me. It was actually the Rákosi dictatorship that wakened me to what had happened to me in Auschwitz, which up to that point I had spoken about in the breezy manner of an old front-line veteran, more or less shrugging it off as light-hearted anecdotes. I didn't try to repress the subject internally, I simply didn't grasp what had actually happened, and then after the 1956 Revolution, when I saw how political manipulators treated people, how they handled the mass of the population, that rounded off my experiences; the materials that were to define my novels in the future. So, the body of experience was ready; it just needed to be expressed.

Gy.D. ◆ *Günther Grass's path did not lead him straight to literature either, since the start of his career called for another form of manual dexterity, first as a stonemason, then as a graphic artist, if I'm not mistaken. Those hands were still making other things, and it was only later, quite late on, in 1955, that you made yourself known to "Gruppe 47", then the most prestigious of West Germany's literary circles, and your literary career got under way. For those of us living*

behind the Iron Curtain Wolfgang Borchert's play The Man Outside *was the first piece of postwar German literature that we got to read, and very little was known about "Gruppe 47" in Hungary. What sort of influence did it have, given that it was they who were the first to read your manuscripts?*

G.G. ◆ I have to say right at the start that my generation was pretty dumb on being released from the dictatorship of National Socialism. For me the early postwar years were a major period of discovery, of catching up. That was when I first saw the pictures of Chagall and Picasso, the German expressionists, everything that had previously been banned, and the impact of those experiences was nothing short of sensational. The same went for literature as well. The works of the great American writers, Faulkner and Hemingway, were published as broadsheets by Rowohlt, on newsprint. That was my first reading matter, and it was formative. On the other hand, going into the fifties, a kind of society began to emerge that was prone to suppress things. The country was destroyed, and it wasn't merely the buildings in ruins that were visible, people carried their own damages on view as well. They didn't want to hear anything more about the past. Then again, there were so many who claimed to have been working in the resistance that one had to wonder how Hitler managed to win power if the resistance had been that strong. It was a deeply mendacious and suppressed society. That was the restorationist Adenauer era, when National Socialism was demonised. The whole thing was presented as if dark earth spirits in SS uniforms had set upon the German people and seduced them. Looking at it from my point of view, I had to dispute that, because I knew it had all taken place in broad daylight. There may have been a favourable contributory factor, in that I had grown up in Danzig. After the Great War, Danzig had been made a free state, so National Socialism came to it later than in the rest of the Reich. Danzig was only annexed to the Reich in 1939. And one was able to observe, even as a child one could observe, how the thing spread, how it all happened in broad daylight, how enthusiasm in the Hitler Youth was boundless. In other words, there wasn't any question of earth spirits or clandestine operations. That too contributed to the aim that my novels, from *The Tin Drum* on, should portray—from the point of view of the social stratum I was familiar with, the petty bourgeoisie—the changes that had taken place, gradually at first but then with alarming speed, throughout the whole of society. These were decisive factors. As far as manuscripts go, by that time I was already writing poetry all the time. One day my first wife and my older sister, who happened to be visiting, had the idea of responding to an advertisement that South German Radio had placed in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* announcing a poetry competition. With my agreement, they stuffed seven or eight of my poems in an envelope and entered them for this competition. I won third prize. When I got back to Berlin with the prize—it was 300 marks, which for me was a lot of money in those days, enough to buy a warm overcoat—there was a telegramme waiting for me: Gruppe 47 meeting in

Berlin at Wannsee. Come with manuscript! So I went, read my poems to them, and within a short time I had a publisher.

Gy.D. ◆ *Who won first prize?*

G.G. ◆ The first prize in the competition went to an Austrian poet, Christine Busta; the person who got the second prize went on to become an art historian.

Gy.D. ◆ *Propaganda in Hungary presented the Adenauer era and the fifties very much in black and white terms, like everything else. Our image of Germany was that there were "reactionaries" and then there was the KPD, the Communist Party of Germany. The fact that there were Social Democrats only leaked out quite a bit later. I'm therefore interested to know from Imre Kertész how, after you had got back home, Germany—by now split in two—continued to live in you?*

I.K. ◆ West Germany lived on in me as the country of the economic miracle, East Germany as something that must be very similar to our own country, where what we had in practice was oppression. As far as I was concerned, the Stalinist years were years of impotence and idleness, total aimlessness. The only reason they were not spent in total depression was that I had a circle of friends, and it was actually possible to poke a huge amount of fun at the inanities that went on.

Gy.D. ◆ *That was the world of music-halls?*

I.K. ◆ Yes, a world of music-halls and jokes, a world of night cafés where people could sit around for hours, where people didn't dare go home because they were afraid of being internally exiled. Understand? The cafés and coffee bars had a distinctive atmosphere, one in which I lived, where we ought to have been afraid but refused to be. I was always saying that after Auschwitz nothing more could happen, could it? What was left to intimidate me? Having lived through that, what is there left to be afraid of? I tried to evoke a little of that atmosphere, that strange atmosphere which is so hard to conceive of nowadays, in my novel *The Failure*. That was the time when nobody had their own home, nobody had any money, night after night there were long and profound conversations, jokes were cracked, and nobody knew what tomorrow might bring.

Gy.D. ◆ *That was when Günther Grass, on the other hand, lost half his country. What was the GDR like, seen through West German eyes, during the fifties and subsequently?*

G.G. ◆ To start with, I studied at the Düsseldorf College of Art, then in 1953 I went to the Academy of Fine Arts in Berlin, West Berlin that is to say. At that time it was still possible to cross over into East Berlin without any restriction. The Wall had not yet been built. In our sculpture studio there were even some artists who lived in East Berlin and studied at the West Berlin Academy. Then in 1956, after my training in Karl Hartung's master class had ended, I went off with

my wife to Paris, which is where I wrote *The Tin Drum*. Back then, in 1956, the Hungarian Revolution was a highly formative experience for me as an outside observer. But right then France was embroiled in Indo-China, and the fighting in Algeria had begun. Politically, it was an exciting time. On top of that, there was the Suez crisis, at the same time as the uprising in Hungary. The West could not come up with anything better than to unleash a new war. Hungary was left in the lurch. Those were formative experiences for me. Along with other foreigners, I was in Paris to attend to work and the arts. I wrote my novel, and by the time I returned to Germany the CDU had won an absolute majority in the 1957 general election. The restoration was at its high point. Anyway, when I had got back and the book was published it was a success on the one hand, but on the other hand it provoked a lot of protests and legal actions for pornography and blasphemy. The book came out when the restoration was in full swing, in a very narrow-minded lower-middle-class world. That wasn't actually of much concern to me, because as soon as *The Tin Drum* had appeared I had got cracking on the next book. The business of writing was an obsession, and one thing that maybe had a bearing on that, indeed definitely had a bearing on that, was that the loss of my native city had been total. It was quite obvious to me that I had lost it forever.

Gy.D. ◆ *Danzig?*

G.G. ◆ Yes. And it was only possible to recreate what had perished by literary means. In 1958 I made my first trip to Poland in order to research the background for what I wrote about the defence of the Polish Post Office. That was the first time I had gone back to my native city, the centre of which still clearly bore the marks of its complete destruction, although they had made a start on rebuilding it in the original style. I met town-dwellers there who, just like me, were from refugee families, from Vilnius and Grodno, and had initially felt they were strangers in the city. In Warsaw, being a German, I had been treated very warily, at arm's length, but in Gdansk people were curious about where I was from. I was from Gdansk. They immediately understood how I must feel in a city where the population had meanwhile been completely exchanged; they understood that I too was searching for my self. That too was a decisive experience, when I grasped that the infernal Hitler–Stalin pact had displaced the whole of Poland westward. It had been exactly the same there as in Germany, with refugees, the expelled who had lost their homeland. That loss, that total loss, placed such a definitive stamp on my subsequent writing that it turned me into a virtual obsessive. Using literary means, I had to evoke what had been lost. I wanted to evoke everything with the greatest possible precision and yet also still leave room for my imagination.

Gy.D. ◆ *We had some knowledge here too of the controversy that surrounded* The Tin Drum. *I recollect very precisely that when the first week of West German films was put on in Hungary in 1980 the cinemas were only allowed to sell tickets for half the available seats. The East German embassy made sure that the cinema should not*

be full when The Tin Drum *was being shown. And I know, Günther Grass, that you were also very much under critical fire in Poland at that time, and for very much the same reasons as in Adenauer's Germany. Anyone who was a Social Democrat during the 1960s fell right in the middle of the crossfire of the two camps, didn't he?*

G.G. ◆ Certainly the way I saw social democracy. During the 1968 student protests I published a volume of political writings for which I wrote a preface with the title "A Revisionist's Foreword." That was a profanity I deliberately pinned to myself as a badge of honour, because I think that anyone who concerns himself with politics, in a Social Democratic sense, can only do so as a revisionist. We have already spoken about how certain books had a powerful influence on me. One of those was a book by the Polish writer Czeslaw Milosz, and it's not his poetry I'm thinking of now but the book that came out in the fifties under the title *The Captive Mind,* in which he describes the evolution of the various factions of Polish writers and intellectuals: right-wing fanatics, left-wing fanatics, Catholic religious fanatics. How they kept changing their positions, how they lost plain common sense through ideological thinking, how they swapped sides, whether out of opportunism or even conviction, and there became even more fanatical. That book made a profound impact on my thinking. On top of that, it was around the same time that I read an essay by Camus on the myth of Sisyphus. It made a lot of sense to me. Camus re-interpreted this hero of antiquity as someone who keeps on cursing the gods and all he asks of them is that they let him keep his rock. He believes in his rock; he knows that the rock won't stay put on top of the hill. I concluded from this that it makes no sense to plump for either pessimism or optimism because the rock isn't going to stay on the top anyway. And that's the way it should be. It's only ideologies that seek to present a world in which the rock stays put on the top, one in which a set goal is attainable. Fundamentally, that is also the position I hold as a Social Democrat. There is no such thing as a definitive historical narrative with which to delude people and in which a definitive goal can be laid down, even though that is what feeds all ideologies. And one other thing that was certainly conducive to my seeing the world in this light, I asked myself, as indeed many others of my generation asked themselves, how the collapse of the Weimar Republic had been possible. Beside the well known factors that led up to that, I think the main reason was that, given its rickety foundations, there were too few democrats to defend the Weimar Republic. That was the primary lesson for me. Thus, insofar as I have been politically active over decades, I did that not in my capacity as a writer but as a citizen, a citoyen of my country who happens to be a writer by profession. That was the point: a commitment fulfilled as a bourgeois engagé. As you yourselves must surely also sense here, in Hungary, democracy is not a constant, it must be defended every day anew. Democracy can just as easily be a hollowed out empty husk, a mere formality in which the machinery still functions, but basic democratic rights are asserted less and less. These are the consequences I drew.

Gy.D. ◆ *Whilst Günther Grass was fighting what was, in fact, a fairly solitary battle for the renewal of the German spirit and political culture, the young Imre Kertész—in the thick of music-hall, theatre and fears of internment—picked up one of Thomas Mann's novellas,* Mario and the Magician. *What were you able to read in that?*

I.K. ◆ Actually, it was not *Mario and the Magician* that I picked up but another of his long stories, *The Blood of the Walsungs,* which interested me because at that time I was a huge Wagner fan, and *The Blood of the Walsungs* was the first piece of writing to strike as something that had been written by a real writer, and that was such a jolt that I remained under its spell for months. Given that György Lukács was also partial to Thomas Mann, as a result, Thomas Mann's works had gradually started to appear again in Hungary. That was about the only truly good thing Lukács ever accomplished, because it enabled me to get to know the short novels, like *Death in Venice* and *Mario and the Magician,* but above all the essays. This would have been around 1954–55, which was a period when the sort of literature that was generally available in Hungary was Azheyev's *A White Sail in the Distance, Far from Moscow,* and stuff like that. Whilst Mr Grass was striving towards political engagement, I was striving to extricate myself from the omnipresent politics of the ubiquitous dictatorship. I aimed to run before the wind but off to the margins, and I managed to do that. Through the light-entertainment pieces that I wrote, I put myself in a position where I didn't have to take on a steady job, and I was able to make a living from that while I made a start on putting *Fatelessness* together.

Gy.D. ◆ *Did you read those Thomas Mann novellas in Hungarian?*

I.K. ◆ Those I did, yes, and another thing that is also relevant here is that around the same time, during the 1957 Book Week, I came upon a little, yellow-jacketed book. A little book with the title *The Outsider,* by Albert Camus. It is interesting that Camus also set Mr Grass off on his career, and it was really *The Outsider* that was decisive for me. I kept on reading and rereading it until I virtually knew the text off by heart, and it made me extraordinarily curious about Camus' other works, such as the essay on Sisyphus, which were unobtainable in Hungary then.

Gy.D. ◆ *What about Milosz, for example?*

I.K. ◆ He was only published here in Hungary after the change in regime. I read him with considerable interest but he was less of a shock, except perhaps in how unjustly he treated Borowski, wouldn't you say?

Gy.D. ◆ *All these impacts were made on you via the Hungarian, so where did the German language come in, and why German in particular?*

I.K. ◆ When I was young, German was a compulsory language. During my primary school years I went to an establishment where we learned German and English by the Montessori method. In the *gimnázium* German was compulsory, so I acquired

some of the basics then, and after that all sorts of literature became German literature, since I don't read French, but the French authors to whom I was able to gain access during the sixties—I read them in German translation, courtesy of the Rowohlt paperbacks, in the same way as Mr Grass. That was the imprint that *The Myth of Sisyphus* and the rest appeared under and which I was able to get hold of here in Hungary because one of the foreign-language bookshops sold those kinds of books, so I was able to read French literature in German.

Gy.D. ◆ *In that same foreign-language bookshop, incidentally, it was also possible in 1969 to buy Günther Grass's* Über das Selbstverständliche, *which as far as I was concerned was the first critique of the '68 students from that previously mentioned 'revisionist' standpoint. We know, Mr Grass, that during the sixties you became quite closely involved in politics. You played an active role in the SDP's electoral campaigns and were a friend of the charismatic Willy Brandt. In Hungary that sort of intense political engagement has been the rule. Wasn't it an exotic, as it were premodern phenomenon in Germany?*

G.G. ◆ During the fifties, writers, the famous ones, and of course I wasn't one of those at the time, would content themselves with signing the occasional protest against this or that. Mostly, of course, they had good reason to do so, but then that was all there was to it. In my case, when I came back to Berlin from Paris in 1960, things were different. A year later the Wall was built in Berlin, and the mayor of Berlin at that time was Willy Brandt, and this was when he was first put up as a Social Democrat candidate and ran for a seat in the *Bundestag*. In the same year, in September 1961, Konrad Adenauer gave an infamous speech in Regensburg in which he stigmatised Brandt for having left Germany under the Nazis and for being born out of wedlock to boot, which in those days still carried weight with some people. The general public looked on this as some sort of matter of honour. It was really this that induced me to do more than just sign protest letters. Later on, I got to know Brandt through Egon Bahr, his press secretary, and I helped him to write speeches and campaign addresses. One of his habits, for instance, was not saying "I" in places where that was appropriate, instead he used elaborate circumlocutions, such as "the one speaking to you here" and that kind of thing. I just wrote in "I" each time. Bahr said, look here, you'll have done very well if you get only thirty per cent of your changes through. That indeed is how it turned out. I travelled with Brandt on the campaign trail, and so was able to hear for myself the effect obtained by the speeches, which I too had worked on, and I decided that four years later I would organise a campaign tour with students in which everything would be done in line with my own way of working. That sort of thing is hugely draining, of course, and also carries certain risks, because the language of politics is a hand-me-down vernacular. One has to be able to draw clear distinctions between what you can get away with in a literary style and what people need to be told straight, politically speaking, without any

fudging or glossing, without resorting to ugly terms such as "amending legislation" or "legal claim" that keep on creeping into politics. That was one part of it. On the other hand, I also learnt a great deal. I travelled to regions and met people whom I could have never reached through literature, came into contact with for me quite new strata of society. So in that sense I never regretted putting in the efforts. And I have to tell you that the way Brandt was capable of listening to writers and other intellectuals, paying attention to them, that was a first in German politics. He was very good at listening to people, and then assimilating some of those ideas after his own fashion. That was heartening. Equally, I also learned certain things from him: what I knew about poetry, for example, was that there can be no compromising in a poem, but I learnt from him that in politics one can only survive by being capable of compromising. Two polar opposites that are hard to reconcile. That was one of them. The other thing was that while this man was a hard-boiled pragmatist, at the same time he also had the courage to look beyond the end of his nose—and moreover at a time when Germany was totally ossified.

Brandt developed new ways of handling things, such as the policy of taking small steps and the policy for people in the GDR that brought an easing of the travel restrictions on them. He took the first steps that were to lead to the Helsinki conference and thereby was instrumental in the eventual implosion of the whole Soviet block. When he was no longer chancellor, and it still impresses me to this day, back in the seventies—at a time when East–West tensions were still high—he was commissioned by the United Nations to write the North–South Report, and he said that this was going to be the big problem of the future. But he didn't just describe the Third World's poverty, he also showed new ways ahead. He said that what was needed was a new world economic order in which Third World countries could negotiate on an equal footing with rich nations, that we needed an internal policy for the world. When I compare that with the present and see how impotent we are in responding to terrorism, and how we think, or the world's only superpower, the United States of America, thinks that terrorism can be countered by military means, then I can't help but recall Willy Brandt. Without the kind of effort the Americans were capable of after the war, without a Marshall Plan for the Third World, terrorism will never be contained. It will just grow and grow. And these, in my view, are political pointers that are of interest not only from a political point of view, since they have opened up the horizon for me in literary terms as well—in the sense that I haven't just kept staring at the fixed point of Danzig.

Gy.D. ◆ *This Danzig, or Gdansk, this primal experience to which the trilogy kept returning, this world of Kashubs, Poles and Germans—this diversity is possibly what resonated most deeply for Hungarians. Nevertheless, I would like at this point to turn to Imre Kertész, who even if his political inclinations had been stronger than the literary ones would have had little opportunity to become involved in electoral campaigns, given that this was a one-party state. Something did change, admittedly, in that the never-formulated yet still much-parroted slogan of "Anyone who*

is not against us is with us" did come along, and so too did that era of stifling conviviality in which although many things were permitted, many other things were still forbidden. This is the period when Imre Kertész the reader turned into Imre Kertész the writer, the 1970s, when I first got to know you.

I.K. ◆ The seventies were preceded by the sixties. Around the time when Mr Grass was beavering away on political commitment, I was beavering away on why a writer should not commit himself politically. That's very characteristic, and indeed it is obviously tied up with the one-party system versus a democracy. Those are two completely different dimensions, and for me to be able to work, to be independent, I had to sever all political ties. I'm not really sure, it may well be that I am not political by nature, but that's the position and, to skip forward in time, what I am living through nowadays is what Mr Grass said earlier, that a democracy is a thing in which the lesson has to be recited each and every day, so to say. To put it another way, the consensus has to be reaffirmed every day. That is hard work and also highly beneficial, but back in those days I had no need of any consensus, I loathed consensus. If memory serves me right, I would sit with you in the writers' retreat at Szigliget and we would have great fun at the expense of the consensus. It was very important for me that there should be no political ties to the society in which I was living, and I had no taste for that regime, you put it very well, that stifling conviviality, the conformity, the weekend cottage, the Trabant, the holidays and those sorts of things.

Gy.D. ◆ *Something happened all the same, because you wrote* Fatelessness *and it was published, albeit only after a great many difficulties, in 1975, at which point you turned your back on sketch writing and the theatre and started translating German literature. Was there not something more calculated behind that? A sort of "meta-political" gesture, if you will, toward literature?*

I.K. ◆ It would not be untrue to say that translating was my choice. After *Fatelessness* appeared I gained the right to make the trip down to the writers' retreat at Szigliget and it was there that I met István Bart, and he asked me if I did any translating, to which I said "I don't," and he rejoined "a writer has to translate!" That was how my career as a translator got under way. The first job I got was a book, a novel by Tankred Dorst, parts of which are in dialect. A peasant dialect did exist in Hungary, of course, but I was unwilling to write in that, so I didn't know what I should do. I went back to the Európa publishing house where Bart and Levente Osztovits were working as English-language editors and asked them what I should do. One of them said "It's not done for translators to hand books back!" and went back to his work. So I say, "What am I to do with this book, then?" "Translate it!" said the other. That was when it dawned on me that translating actually meant—contrary to what Goethe thought—giving them a well-written Hungarian novel. There was nothing for it, I took the book back home

and for the bits that I didn't understand I made up dialogue that logically fitted the plot. That was how I started translating, and I much preferred doing that to writing sketches and light comedy pieces, so the material that I came to translate grew more and more rewarding until in the end I got to Nietzsche, whom I had always adored and regarded as a great stylist, so *The Birth of Tragedy* was, for me, the pinnacle of my career as a translator... I'm very proud of that.

Gy.D. ◆ *Any writer who wanted to make a living did translating, but even so it must have taken some masochism to seek to replicate the vernacular that Wittgenstein uses, and to be successful at that. Who encouraged you to do that?*

I.K. ◆ No one encouraged me, because I received a bursary to do it in Vienna. That was after the change in regime, and I launched into Wittgenstein with a lot of energy, but then it turned out that the bursary I had been granted was invalid because Európa, which had commissioned me to do the work had failed to acquire the translation rights. Meanwhile another publisher had acquired the rights to the same book, to be translated by Éva Ancsel. As a result, the two texts were cross-checked and Éva Ancsel magnanimously surrendered the translation to me, and Európa acquired the rights. The translation isn't a faithful one, because like every translation it slightly embellishes the material; I simply could not present the publisher with incomprehensible, fragmentary, broken-off sentences like some that I came across in the original.

Gy.D. ◆ *So in other words, you made a decent book of it!*

I.K. ◆ Well, I did my best.

Gy.D. ◆ *Günther Grass, when you undertook that extraordinarily strong political commitment during the sixties, you were in fact going along with your country putting an era behind it, the Adenauer era, and much later on, when the Social Democratic Party no longer had any charismatic leaders, indeed you were already at loggerheads with the party, you also played a part in helping the country put another such era behind, this time the Kohl era. Do you as a writer have some sort of seismographic sense of when an era is nearing its end?*

G.G. ◆ I can't give a blanket answer to that, I can't speak for other writers. I can only speak from my own experience, although I do also see myself as following a tradition of sorts. There have always been writers who, despite censorship and persecution, set their sights on something that would only be assimilated much later. After all, we are all children of the European Enlightenment. When you consider all these books that were repeatedly banned, first by this then by that camp, Montaigne, for instance, the father of the Enlightenment, who has been banned in turns by the right and the left, sometimes both camps at once, yet this development has still shaped us, socially, politically, behaviourally. Without the processes unleashed by the Enlightenment the supplanting of the Middle Ages

and all that scholastic philosophy would have been unimaginable. At the same time, the Enlightenment itself gives us the tools to recognise how far and at what point the Enlightenment went wrong—by treating reason as an absolute good, for example. When one considers that temples of reason were built during the French Revolution, that's a very clear emblem of that error. To answer the question, there is certainly a European tradition in this domain, a German tradition. But I can't generalise it. What I said before, that I am politically active primarily as a citizen who happens to be a writer by profession, it is first and foremost as a citizen who happens to be a writer by profession, that's something I consider necessary in general. Not just in the literary sphere but in other intellectual occupations as well, because without this kind of engagement democracy withers away and can support no burden. You already mentioned that here in Hungary you too will find out that democracy is not simply a gift about which one says "Yes, it's mine now and it's here to stay." It is always endangered from within. Sometimes it is hard to detect where these perils come from. To mention just one example, in the 1980s neo-liberalism appeared with Thatcher in the UK and with Reagan in America. It calls itself neo-liberalism, but in fact it is just a recycling of the nineteenth-century Manchester School of laissez-faire capitalism, along with all the mechanisms of oppression that we sense around us. As a result, in all the Western democracies it is no longer parliaments that decide what laws are going to be passed but the lobbyists groups of vested interests. Lobbying from sectional interests has become so powerful and self-sufficient that in Germany, say, a health-care reform cannot be passed unless the pharmaceutical industry, the doctors' and pharmacists' associations, and the health-insurance companies agree. In other words, the law is basically pre-formulated by the lobbies. This impairs legislation and at the same time erodes democracy. No wonder more and more people, especially the young, say "I'm not going to vote." It's just a travesty. Decisions are not made by parliament or government but by prior arrangement in the industrial sphere where there is no democratic control. So, I think democracies are not endangered by terrorism so much as by their own negligence, their willingness to surrender decision-making powers to lobbyists. This is a development that I watch with great concern and weigh in against whenever the opportunity arises.

Gy.D. ◆ *Hungarians seem to have some sort of instinct at work, because so far at the end of each four-year electoral cycle they have booted out the current government just when it was seeking to establish a new era. That's no bad thing. But have you managed, Imre Kertész, to retain your fringe position, your curtailing of political commitment to a minimum, since becoming a famous writer, indeed, world-famous? Is it still possible to be privately creative in the midst of that sort of din?*

I.K. ◆ No, it's not possible. And in fact it would be stupid for a person to marginalise himself in a democracy, stupid for a writer too, I mean; it is impossible for a prose writer to drop out. One isn't allowed to in any case. One is immedi-

ately provoked by something that makes one angry or delights one and one is forced to speak one's mind, as simple as that. The first time I experienced this big change was at the time Sándor Csoóri's essay with anti-Semitic declarations was published. Back then, I felt it was worth battling that—and I mean 1990, when we had been liberated, as I would call it, and I considered it made sense to take issue on this matter. That settled my fate; I could not stay aloof from such debates. The position we have now reached is that certain circles, by completely distorting things I have said, have labelled me a traitor to my nation, who slanders Hungary abroad, and for the most part they compile these supposed slanders from spurious quotations. I have to fight against that as well.

Gy.D. ◆ *That's their funeral, not just your business. But now, if I may, I would like to put an indelicate question to both of you. During a dinner with Eckermann in 1827, Goethe talked about what great works he wanted to live to see, and in a brief prophesy of global communications and trade he remarked that he would like to see the opening of a passage through the isthmus of Panama among other things. What one needs to know is that this was a very specific project that was being proposed at the time. The fact that it was delayed, and not just in relation to Goethe, is quite another matter. The question I have for both authors is if there is anything that they would like to live to see.*

I.K. ◆ Well, first I have to slightly correct your image of Goethe. It's true that Goethe would have liked to see the opening of the Panama Canal, but his Faust died during the draining of Holland, didn't he? So, we again have a case of the poet being better informed than the personality. What would I like to live to see? I would like to live to see a secure world. I would like to live to see a world where there is no terrorism, where there is a civil harmony in which there are moods such that one can sit outside on a coffee-house terrace on a Sunday, the sun is shining mildly, it's spring, and one turns the pages of a newspaper and seated beside one is a woman whom one loves, and one knows that this is how it will be until one dies. So, I would like to live to see something like that. Peace.

G.G. ◆ As far as literature is concerned, I wish they would revoke Germany's spelling reform. In politics, I agree: security and an end to terrorism. But that brings me back again to the need to accomplish at last what Willy Brandt outlined in his North-South Report, that we treat and esteem poor countries as equals and negotiate with them on an equal footing. We must create the conditions for fighting and containing terrorism. Whether it can ever be defeated, I rather doubt: a residue of insecurity will always remain. But it's clear to me that the goal will not be achieved the way the issue is being addressed now, purely by military means. On the contrary, that will only create new generations of terrorists. One has to ask basic questions about where terrorism comes from, and what its origins are. And in doing so we must examine ourselves, since we are partly responsible. ❧

Julian Schöpflin

The Great Literary Pigsticking Event

In Memoriam of three noted Hungarian exiles:
Arthur Koestler, George Mikes and Emeric Pressburger.

George Mikes was a frequent visitor to our house in the early eighties. He was, in contrast to many humorists I had known (who usually are glum and boring persons), a lively and witty man, who enjoyed every miniute of existence and left no stone unturned where some sort of amusement was to be found.

We lived at that time in a spacious farmhouse on the outskirts of a Norfolk village. We were in comfortable retirement, both my wife and myself, and welcomed George, the well-known jokester, with open arms. Many a cheerful evening was passed in playing Scrabble, of which George was an enthusiast (with one snag: he hated to lose, especially to my eighteen-year-old grandson).

It was Mikes who brought us together with another East Anglian hermit: Emeric Pressburger, the film-maker, author of many famous films in the forties and fifties. He lived in the depths of Suffolk, in a tiny gingerbread house, called Shoemakers Cottage (alluding to his memorable film, *The Red Shoes*). He fought a losing battle there, trying to protect his goldfish in the garden pond from marauding herons. He was a marvellous storyteller of his days as a down-and-out in Berlin and Paris, and of his triumphs and tribulations in the film business.

Another member of Mikes' network of friends was Arthur Koestler, who had a retreat in the western part of Suffolk. He was an old friend of ours too, but after we had moved from London we saw him less frequently.

We went over one morning to a neighbouring farm, to buy eggs. George came with us and looked round the farm with some interest. It was a genuine farm,

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Julian Schöpflin

worked in publishing and radio before becoming the Hungarian envoy to Sweden and Norway in 1949. Fearing he might become involved in the political show trials, he left his post and settled in England where he lived until his death, at the age of 94, on 18 June, 2004. He sent this piece to The Hungarian Quarterly *shortly before his death as a response to Gábor Miklósi's musings on Hungarian concerns related to EU regulations in* HQ *173.*

with lots of animals: geese, hens, calves and pigs. I noticed that he stood for a while, somewhat pensively, before the pigsty and gazed thoughtfully at the gambolling, screeching piglets. One could virtually see that the cogwheels in his fertile mind started moving. I waited, with expectant amusement, wondering what wily idea he would come up with.

"Do you think one could buy a pig from the farmer?" he asked.

"Why not?" I replied, "let's ask him. But what for?"

"For a traditional pigsticking—like the ones we had in Hungary." I liked the idea, although at that moment I couldn't quite see how we could recreate such an unusual event in the wilds of East Anglia.

We asked the farmer who, of course, was very willing to sell us a pig, then—as he said—have it slaughtered at the abattoir and delivered cut into neat pieces, at the marked price of the day of slaughtering. George, however, wanted none of this; he had different—and more grandiose—ideas.

"In Hungary, in the olden days, a pig-sticking was a very serious event: it was arranged just before Christmas, with elaborate preparations. A household was fully engaged in various preliminaries; arriving at the great day, the whole neighbourhood assembled to witness the killing, the burning off of the pig's bristles in the open, the solemn preparation of the 'first-fruits'—different spicy sausages, partly made with the blood, partly with the liver; a great feast followed, with eating, drinking (lots of it) and general jollity. The housewife, of course, had many other burdensome tasks: curing the bacon, smoking the hams and another sort of sausages. I am sure there were ancestral memories of a pagan sacrifice in this festive ritual"—he explained.

I had serious doubts how on earth we would manage—not so much the prosaic, functional steps, but the time-hallowed ritualistic elements of the procedure. Mikes, however, was in full swing and brushed aside my reservations.

Discussions about the matter started in earnest that evening. Mikes cut short the confused arguments about when, where, what and if at all (my wife was a bit reluctant, having an inkling that the main burden of such an enterprise would fall on her).

"We must proceed in this in an orderly manner, we must set up a proper committee", said Mikes.

"What, a pig committee?" I enquired.

"Yes, good idea, let's call it a Pig Committee! But it must not be just any old committee—it is to be fashioned in the proper manner".

So was the Pig Committee formed on the 29th August, 1982. It was agreed, in the time-hallowed way, after motions, secondments (and much laughter), that Mikes would be appointed Chairman and Pig Captain, myself the Secretary, my wife Economic Director, Emeric Specialist Adviser and—a honorific title—Arthur Koestler Scientific Adviser. Koestler, sadly, was at an advanced stage of Alz-

heimer's and more and more a recluse; Mikes thought of cheering him up a little by drawing him into the affairs of the porkers.

It was also unanimously agreed that the Aims and Purposes of the Committee should be: "The procurement, purchase, rearing and eventual slaughtering of two pigs, of Welsh origin, Hungarian adoption and English education".

Thus, the ball started rolling and this was unstoppable. Mikes undertook to find a butcher who would perform the final act in the traditional Hungarian manner—no mean task. Mikes, always inventive, turned to the Cultural Attaché of the Hungarian Embassy (who else?) and struck gold. A master butcher, of Hungarian origin, living near London, was recommended; George took the trouble to look him up and secure his services.

Mr Perity, the butcher, was as good as his word; from that day, he was in constant telephone communication with my wife, advising her on the preparations and supplies required. This was no joke: one kilogramme of caraway seeds; three kilogrammes of red onions; half a kilogramme of peppercorns; half a kilogramme of garlic; seven kilogrammes of coarse salt; and a large quantity of straw (the farmer, happily, agreed to supply this). The local healthfood shop sold caraway seeds in milligramme portions; they looked very puzzled when my wife wanted to buy one full kilogramme.

Mr Perity also gave instructions on the feeding of the pigs. Maize was to be recommended, soaked in milk—unfortunately the farmer rejected this out of hand; our pigs would eat the same menu as his pigs, that is, barley and pigswill and no nonsense. This had eventually rather sad consequences.

We gave much thought, in subsequent meetings of the Committee, to all this wherewithal required for the great day. Mikes undertook to get hold of 25 pieces of apfelstrudel; my son George (who had been nominated Corresponding Member) took on the tricky task of preparing twenty kilogrammes of sauerkraut; I myself had the comparatively easy job of getting 6 large and 6 small bottles of genuine Pilsner beer and 12 bottles of Californian red wine. (You may wonder why we did not choose a Hungarian red? Well, we had rather sad experiences with the mistakenly famed Bulls Blood, which, alas, had come down in the world.) Cutlery, crockery and so on would be offered—under suitable indemnity—by my wife.

Many other important matters had to be decided on subsequent sittings of the Pig Committee. For instance, whether to name the pigs, or not. This led to heated arguments: finally, we voted Mikes down, stating that one didn't slaughter close acquaintances. Wasn't there a whiff of hypocrisy?

Another question of debate was a proposed invitation (by Mikes) to various television companies. Pressburger, who, of course, knew the film and TV world, argued very wisely that this would spoil the intimate family ambience we hoped to maintain. We wholeheartedly agreed with him, and duly shot down Mikes' perfid motion.

There was also the important matter of the caraway seeds to be resolved. Namely, whether to put them in all the sausages—Emeric contended, in a learned address, that this was the traditional Hungarian way—or only some of them. The decision was worthy of Salomon: one quarter of the sausages were to be prepared with caraway seeds and three quarters without.

Mikes, who left no subject unexploited, made good use of our hectic preparations: he gave a (mildly funny) talk on the BBC Hungarian Service about the planned pigstickery. A slightly surprising feedback was a letter from a similar fellowship in Frankfurt; it was unanimously decided by the committee to send a fraternal greeting telegram to our soulmates in Germany.

The great day finally arrived, in early December.

Our house resembled Gorky's famous drama, *The Nocturnal Dosshouse,* the night before the great event. There were not only Mikes and his girlfriend; my son brought down two friends of his, two professors of political science at various American universities, also one of his daughters, with the reluctant agreement of the Pig Committee. So our farmhouse, which slept four people in reasonable comfort, now had to accommodate eight, in reasonable discomfort. Mr Perity—and his two sons (who came as "learners")—were put up in a neighbouring farm.

Mr Perity called me at the crack of dawn. There was some trouble with the farmer: he objected to the slaughtering at his farm, fearing that the screams of the animals would upset his own pigs. Perity assured him that he would anaesthetise the unfortunates; so he came and asked me for a good-sized hammer.

"To hit them on the head", he explained. This gave new meaning to the word "anaesthesia", of great interest to my wife, who had been an anaesthetist in a previous incarnation.

So the two pigs were despatched silently and tactfully, the carcasses transported to our garden, and the great ritual of "burning off the bristles" was performed before the assembled household and curious neighbours. Acrid smoke wafted to the sky; the sizzling flames lit up the gloomy December morning, and woke up ancestral memories in most of us.

It was hectic work all the morning after that. Mr Perity went to it with proper skills and increasing dissatisfaction about the failings in part of the pigs and even more of our household. The pigs were too skinny, not having been fed according to his instructions; there was to be no proper white bacon from them. The hams were too puny, hardly worth the bother. Then he asked for a large wooden trough or tub, for the puny hams.

A wooden trough, of the large variety? "Every decent household used to have one of these, specially for soaking the hams", he grumbled. We produced, somewhat shamefacedly, a plastic wheelbarrow, lined with polythene sheets.

"Better than nothing", commented Perity witheringly. Then he demanded long wooden poles, to hang up the sausages. The two American professors were, luckily, adept at fashioning such poles and did that with great concentration.

We had to admit, Perity did his various jobs with great skill and economy. Everything was ready by midday. Perity gave various instructions to my wife: for example, how to smoke the sausages ("Just lay down some wood chippings—mind you, oak and beach only—and let them burn overnight". This did not seem a good idea to us, considering the thatched roof of the house.) Or how to soak the hams ("Change the water and the salt every day, then, after a fortnight, take them to the smokehouse".)

The festive lunch was a great success. There were about twenty of us, friends, neighbours, countrymen. We ate, with great gusto, the soft sausages and odd cuts of meat, drank the beer and wine, and earned lavish praise for the successful pig-sticking.

Perity, however, declined to take part in all this; he got his fee, packed up and departed—with open disgust at the failings of our poor household.

The aftermath of all these jollifications was somewhat less than jolly. We took the sausages to the local butcher for smoking—then he asked us after one day to remove them, complaining that his whole establishment stank of garlic. We found another smokehouse in a neighbouring village: the hams and sausages were duly smoked, but there was one snag. My wife, religiously following Perity's—malevolent—instructions, added more and more salt to the daily marinade. In consequence, we had to face tha sad fact: the wizened hams were, alas, inedible.

The jury is still out on what followed. Mikes collected his own and the Koestler's ration of the goodies and duly delivered them to the Koestler household. The day following this, Koestler and his wife committed suicide. It was a subject for heated debate amongst us, whether the hams *caused* this immolation, or only triggered a stylish exit by the Koestlers, this having been planned long before.

Alas, no more debate can take place. The Pig Committee is only a memory. Both George Mikes and Emeric Pressburger passed away, to our eternal sorrow.

So there has been no more pig-sticking, literary or otherwise. ❧

Krisztina Passuth

Contemporary and Kindred

Modernisms. European Graphic Art 1900–1930. Hungarian National Gallery, June 18–September 12 • Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, 16 October 2004–23 January 2005. Éva Bajkay et al.: *Modernizmusok. Európai grafika 1900–1930/Modernismen: Graphik in Europa 1900–1930.* Cologne, 2004, 334 pp.

What, exactly, makes for a good exhibition, or rather, how do we decide whether an exhibition is good? The decision can be irrational. Yet it is not. We could walk into an exhibition hall and have an immediate response of something vague and obscure; equally, we might enter a room (possibly the same one on a different occasion), and the first impression is captivating and stays with us forever. What we see need not be "spectacular" in the literal sense of the word—a number of small works of art in modest pastel colours could be just as effective. So could be an exhibition of prints and drawings, which are often kept out of exhibition halls, or relegated to remote and obscure wings in cramped conditions, as if no one would really expect them to draw a crowd.

Still, no doubt an entire exhibition made up of prints and drawings can be especially problematic. This recent exhibition in the Hungarian National Gallery is a case in point, as it is devoted entirely to prints and drawings—artworks on paper—from the first third of the 20th century. The novel title *Modernisms*, is apposite, as it encompasses the entire spectrum of the main modern tendencies of the time, from Paul Gauguin to the *Neue Sachlichkeit*. The only exception is Surrealism: its omission was probably justified on the grounds that neither the character of the collection nor the general concept of the show could accommodate it. The choice of the time limits (1900–1930) needs no explanation, since this was the period when modern art demonstrated its most dynamic development, giving rise to countless masterpieces all over Europe, in painting, sculpture and the graphic arts. These three decades were so rich in their achievements that art historians have still not been able to exhaust the subject, with more and more viewpoints and artworks emerging. (To give just one example, I should mention the recent Kandinsky exhibition in the *Kunstforum* in Vienna. Although Kandinsky's works are well-known, this exhibition revealed yet another new side of his, thanks to paintings that had, until recently, been hidden in provincial Russian

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museums and seldom made available to exhibitions abroad.)

The period was one of sweeping changes in Central and Eastern Europe in consequence of the First World War: the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, along with the political events that ensued, left a deep mark on every aspect of culture. Some of those who had enjoyed some degree of success before 1919 (Róbert Berény, Béla Uitz, Lajos Tihanyi or László Moholy-Nagy, for example) left Hungary after 1919, some to return permanently in the second half of the 1920s.

Those among them who were later to achieve international recognition were able to continue their work in relatively favourable conditions (thus László Moholy-Nagy, who was invited to work in the Bauhaus, first in Weimar, later in Dessau). These artists, however, inevitably found themselves out of touch with the Hungarian art world and the best part of their oeuvre ended up in foreign collections.

The works currently on display at the Hungarian National Gallery come from different collections, with the two main contributors being the Hungarian National Gallery and the Staatsgalerie of Stuttgart, with the Budapest Fine Arts Museum also contributing from its graphics collection. Owing to their cooperation the works form a homogeneous whole, irrespective of holder or location. The emphasis is mostly on artists working in Germany and Hungary, although French artists also feature prominently (especially for the early periods); Dutch, Russian and Austrian artists are represented to a lesser extent. Hungarian artists are present, as is a solitary work from Poland; apart from these the art of Central and Eastern Europe is largely omitted. Rather than being a deliberate choice by the curators, this was clearly owing to the fact that the Hungarian National Gallery has restricted its focus to Hungarian art and the Staatsgalerie of Stuttgart has obviously been concentrating on other regions in its acquisition policy.

So what was there to be seen in the halls of the National Gallery? Almost nothing but first-class and, quite often, major works, by such world-renowned artists as Gauguin, Vuillard, Picasso, Kokoschka and Tolouse-Lautrec, Lajos Tihanyi and Otto Dix, to name but a few. The list of lesser known artists includes Ernő Barta, Ludwig Meidner and Hermann Finsterlin. The genuine surprises might have been expected to come from the Stuttgart collection, in view of the fact that we have had very little opportunity to see any of their exhibits in Hungary. Nevertheless, this is not so. Take, for example, the two *Cubist Compositions* by János Vaszary: with their dynamism and energy they rank with the best Hungarian drawings from 1913. Another exhibit with an element of surprise is *Mademoiselle Pogany,* a pencil drawing, by Constantin Brâncuşi dated 1911–1912, the blurred patches of which form a strange, stylised female figure. Here the Hungarian connection is provided by the person of the sitter, Margit Pogány.

She herself was a painter who exhibited both in Paris and in Budapest. She was one of the hundreds of painters who regularly showed their works at the Salon d'Automne or the Salon des Indépendants, without ever catching the eyes of an art critic. In Margit Pogány's case, too, it was not the contemporary art critics who spotted her talent during her stay in Paris in 1910, but the then still lesser known Romanian sculptor, Constantin Brâncuşi, whose studio the young Hungarian visited. When she offered to sit for Brâncuşi he agreed, but the sculpture was not finished during Margit Pogány's stay in Paris. Every time Brâncuşi finished one of his clay models, he destroyed it.

By the time the drawing was completed in 1912 (along with the bust, which later became quite famous), Margit Pogány was no longer in Paris. Brâncuşi captured her likeness from memory.

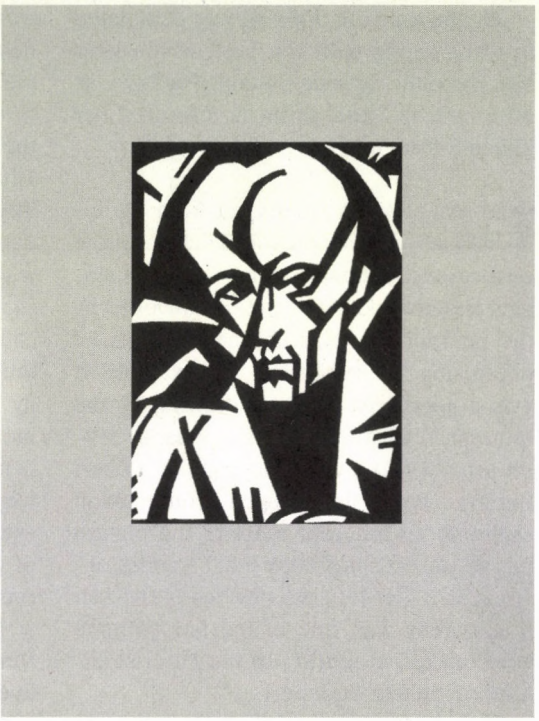
The real surprise comes not from the individual prints or drawings, but from the chance encounters, reverberations, analogies and historical connections unveiled by the preliminary research and the work of organising the exhibition. For example, it was a good idea to put a drawing by the Futurist Boccioni next to an early *Self-Portrait* (1912) by the Hungarian Róbert Berény. With its tangled composition radiating an inherent tension, the picture has a Futurist spirituality that becomes obvious at a glance. Less obvious is the fact that Berény was one of the few painters who reacted in writing to the Futurist exhibition held in Budapest.

Róbert Berény was prominent in the Avant-garde. He was one of those who formed the group *Nyolcak* (The Eight), which held its first exhibition in December 1909. A short while earlier, in 1905, at the age of twenty, Berény took part in the Fauves exhibition in Paris. With their lively colours and plastic figures, his dynamic compositions soon caught the attention of the critics. Around 1905 and 1906 his style of drawing was distinctly Fauvist; a few years later, somewhat surprisingly, he moved closer to the Futurists.

No less surprising for us is to find a fundamentally kindred spirituality between Rippl-Rónai's nudes in Indian ink and reed pen, of an easy, flowing style and Lajos Tihanyi's jagged nude, when they are placed side by side.

Besides Berény, the other most talented member of the *Nyolcak* group was Lajos Tihanyi. One of the best portraitists of the period, he combined Expressionist and Futurist elements in his compositions, which were full of inner tensions and taut field lines. Over his repeated protests, people liked to compare his style of drawing to Kokoschka's; a certain affinity between the two artists undoubtedly existed. Tihanyi's expressive dynamism can be linked to Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's female dancer in blue skirts, whose figure, along with the lightness of the transparent zigzagging lines of blue and green, also recalls Rippl-Rónai. By themselves, these established connections would not necessarily require that works produced either more or less simultaneously or by members of the same movement should be displayed side by side. Picasso's works, for example, would hardly bear the proximity of any of his Hungarian contemporaries, even if one could discover some kind of a link between him and a particular Hungarian artist. In contrast, the link between the Hungarian Activists (whose name was derived from the title of the German magazine *Die Aktion,* even if they started to call themselves Activists only after 1919) and the German Expressionists (Schmidt-Rottluff, Ernst-Ludwig Kirchner, Emil Nolde, etc.) is so apparent that at first glance one might even think they belonged to the same group. The Activists' graphics made us familiar with the method of interrupting the black areas of the woodcuts with roughly worked lighter areas and white patches with thick black lines running across. Placed next to compositions by the Activists, or rather in their vicinity, the linocuts (a simplified version of woodcuts) by János Mattis Teutsch and Sándor Bortnyik seem to be in perfect harmony, as they speak the same language. In the same context, the pen and ink drawings of József Nemes Lampérth and Béla Uitz provide a more refined version of the same mode of expression. The description "woodcut—the language of rebellion" (found in the catalogue) could be applied

to their drawings and linocuts. The Dadaist compositions lent by the Stuttgart museum originate from roughly the same period. They include works by Marcel Duchamp, Kurt Schwitters, Max Ernst and Francis Picabia, as well as an exquisite composition by Man Ray *(Untitled),* who used a technique that had just been discovered then (in 1919), creating a mysterious atmosphere by spraying paint on paper. Still in the same context, we find a folder by Lajos Kassák *(Dur Mappa,* 1924), the style of which conveniently takes us to the next period, referred to by one of the authors of the catalogue, Éva Bajkay, as "Attempts to Achieve 'Pure Art' or the Search for Absolute Form". Here we start out with a drawing, each by Malevich and Rodchenko, as the expressions of both Russian Suprematism and Constructivism and the accompanying new world view. They are grouped with works by Mondrian from the Netherlands in the West in the company of a beautiful item entitled *Mechano-Facture* by Henryk Berlewi from Poland in the East. Using brush and ink, the latter work sets the model for mass-produced visual elements made by machines in 1923. Decades later Berlewi's ideas re-emerged in Victor Vasarely's Op-Art compositions.



Sándor Bortnyik: Portrait of Lajos Kassák; *1919. Linocut, 150 x 110 mm. Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest.*

In the second part of the exhibition, the vocabulary of pure forms so distinctive of Constructivism is manifest in Rodchenko's 1919 compositions: closely related are Béla Uitz's *Analyses* (1921–1922), the abstract forms of which were evidently inspired by Rodchenko. The two distinct visual languages of this new style and new world-view reach their fullest development in two series, or folders. One was produced by El Lissitzky, an artist who at the time lived in Berlin: *Proun. First Kestner Folder* (1923); the other, also from 1923, was László Moholy-Nagy's *Kestner Mappa 6 konstrukció* (Kestner Folder 6 Constructions).

The Kestner Society was a typical institution of the Germany of the time. It supported the most modern Avant-garde artists, by issuing numerous publications. As a further promotion of both their art and the concept of geometrical abstraction, the Kestner Society also published prints by these artists (i.e. El Lissitzky and Moholy-Nagy) in folders.

Lithography was employed for both folders, which were conceived in the spirit of geometrical abstraction, just then becoming the universal idiom. Both were born in Germany, during the few years

Paul Gauguin: *Sadness.*
Volpini Album, 1889.
Zincography, 285 x 228 mm.
Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest.

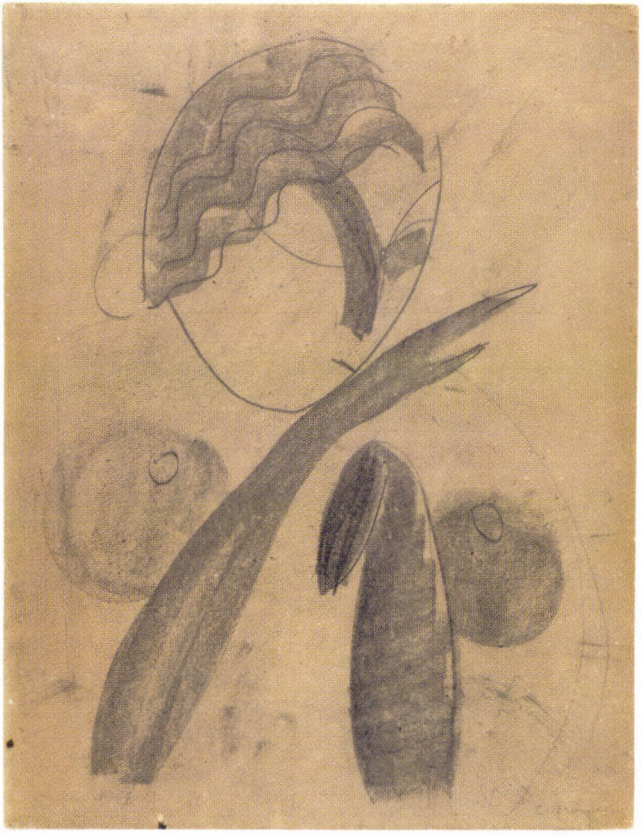
József Rippl-Rónai:
Merry-Making in Bretagne.
1896. Colour lithography,
390 x 525 mm.
Hungarian National Gallery,
Budapest.

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner:
Female Dancer in Blue Skirts.
1908–1909, pastel on light-grey
paper, 426 x 345 mm.
Staatsgalerie Stuttgart,
Graphische Sammlung.

József Rippl-Rónai:
Nude. 1910–1911.
India ink and reed pen
on white paper,
295 x 285 mm.
Hungarian National
Gallery, Budapest.

Egon Schiele: *Self-Portrait.* 1914. Pencil and lead-white on ebony-coloured tissue paper, 485 x 320 mm. Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Graphische Sammlung.

János Vaszary:
Cubist Composition. Nude.
1913. India ink, pen, paper yellowed with age, mounted on cardboard, 600 x 418 mm.
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest.



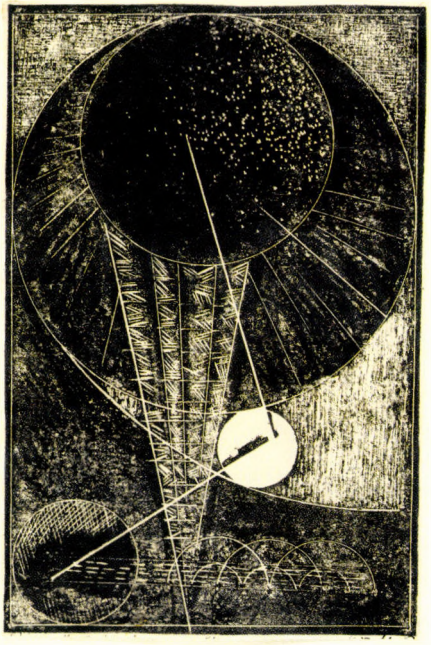
Constantin Brancusi:
Mademoiselle Pogany.
1911–1912. Pencil, partly smeared, on brownish laminated cardboard, 635 x 483 mm.
Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Graphische Sammlung.

Umberto Boccioni:
Solitary Form in Continuous Space.
1913. Pencil on browned paper,
155 x 104 mm.
Staatsgalerie Stuttgart,
Graphische Sammlung.

Róbert Berény: *Self-Portrait.*
1912. India ink and pen
on white paper mounted
on rustic cardboard,
330 x 263 mm.
Hungarian National Gallery,
Budapest.

Lajos Tihanyi:
The Portrait of Branko ve Poljanski.
1925. Black and red crayon on
French drawing paper, 525 x 370 mm.
Hungarian National Gallery,
Budapest.

Franz Marc:
Blue Horse, 1913.
Pencil, water colour outlined
in black on eggshell-
coloured hand-made paper
mounted, 440 x 363 mm.
Staatsgalerie Stuttgart,
Graphische Sammlung.



Béla Uitz: *Analysis,*
1921–1922. Linocut, silk paper mounted
on ebony-coloured cardboard,
323 x 202 mm.
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest.

Alexander Rodchenko:
Suprematist Composition.
1919. Linocut, brownish paper,
165 x 114 mm.
Staatsgalerie Stuttgart,
Graphische Sammlung.

József Nemes Lampérth: *Wooden Churches.* 1917. Brown and black India ink on white cardboard, 505 x 654 mm. Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest.

László Moholy-Nagy: *Landscape, Tabán.* 1919. Pencil on paper yellowed with age, 315 x 445 mm. Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest.

when Berlin was the centre of the international Avant-garde. The exhibition's last section is devoted to the *Neue Sachlichkeit*. The thematic, and in certain cases socially aware, graphical works demonstrate the artists' return to figural representation, detailed execution and caricatured or dramatic presentation. All this forecast the atmosphere of the impending changes in Germany. The new and colourful metropolitan life, which was wonderfully portrayed in Toulouse-Lautrec's music halls and Vuillard's intimate interiors as displayed at the beginning of the exhibition, was transformed into a totally different world within the span of thirty years. In this changed world, social conflicts and their visual representation became much sharper.

The concept of the exhibition was developed jointly by Ulrike Gauss, Head of the Prints and Drawings Department of the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, and Katalin Bakos, senior staff member of the Department of Prints and Drawings in the Hungarian National Gallery. They were responsible for selecting the works and arranging an exhibition, spanning an eventful historical era, into separate chapters; this also defined the structure of the catalogue. Leading Hungarian specialists Éva Bajkay, Mariann Gergely, Anna Kopócsy and Enikő Róka (Head of the Department of Prints and Drawings) contributed to the catalogue. Katalin Bakos is primarily responsible both for the idea of the exhibition as such and for the structure of the catalogue. She succeeded in assembling sheets that chance had made available in Budapest and Stuttgart into a coherent and logical whole. She classified the prints and drawings chronologically and also arranged them with stylistic and aesthetic considerations in mind. In this way new light was thrown on previously unrecognised connections and analogies. The general introduction and the summary reviews were written by Ulrich Pfarr (Stuttgart Museum) and Katalin Bakos. The graphics of Toulouse-Lautrec, Gauguin, Bonnard and Vuillard for the chapter "Graphic Art at the Turn of the Century" were lent by the Budapest Museum of Fine Arts, thus paying tribute to the shared historical origin of the National Gallery and the Museum of Fine Arts. The relevant chapter in the catalogue was written by Zsuzsa Gonda, senior staff member at the Budapest Museum of Fine Arts. The Budapest exhibition was arranged by Katalin Bakos. The exhibition will be shown in Germany between October 15, 2004 and January 25, 2005, in the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart. Ulrike Gauss, who will be in charge of that exhibition, will have a free hand to make modifications to suit the location and to regroup the artworks within the various chapters according to her own ideas.

The foundation, the history and the specific features of both collections are discussed in detail in the catalogue. The Hungarian material shows some irreparable gaps, which were created in the period of stagnation that followed the institution's initial prosperity. During the First World War, the Drawings Department of the Museum of Fine Arts acquired a number of masterpieces by contemporary artists (mostly thanks to the generosity and expertise of the collector Pál Majovszky), greatly adding to the Museum's reputation as a leading European collection. The ensuing political changes (after 1919) brought this initial dynamic development almost to a complete standstill. Later, after 1956, the Hungarian National Gallery took over the collection and storage of Hungarian drawings; as to the acquisition of drawings by foreign artists, it almost completely stopped at the Budapest Museum of Fine Arts. The next period of development came in the 1960s, but by then the financial conditions had become rather unfavourable. Although patrons of Pál Majovszky's cali-

bre could no longer be found, a small but valuable collection of modern drawings was donated to the Museum of Fine Arts by Dr Péter Véghelyi, who also set up a foundation for the acquisition of a number of important works of art.

In enumerating all the factors that contributed to the success of this exhibition (and of the accompanying catalogue), we must look back beyond the last couple of years. The prints and drawings collection of the Hungarian National Gallery itself could not have reached its present state, and therefore it could not have published its material in the present form, had it not been for the acquisitions, research and exhibitions that had taken places in recent decades in very adverse circumstances. When Éva Bajkay began research into the Hungarian Avant-garde and its international connections, it was not a subject supported by the authorities; in those days it was still easier to organise an exhibition on Avant-garde art (for example, the one on the Viennese and German connections of Hungarian Avant-garde artists) in the small town of Békéscsaba, than in Budapest. The older catalogues did contain some new research results, just as the exhibition *Wechselwirkungen. Ungarische Avantgarde in der Weimarer Republik* did contain some new results when it opened in 1986 (in Kassel but not in Hungary). Its catalogue must still be considered as one of the most important sources by Hungarian and foreign researchers alike. (The German counterpart of the Hungarian curator Éva Bajkay was Hubertus Gassner.) Further progress was made possible when the entire bequests of important artists were returned to Hungary (works of artists such as Béla Uitz, Lajos Tihanyi and Anna Lesznai, or more recently, Gizella Dömötör and Hugó Mund, some of them with the assistance of Éva Bajkay and others).

Finally, going back to the times when Avant-garde was still a taboo word in Hungary, I remember how the late Júlia Szabó tried to "dig up" the Avant-garde gems among the drawings and prints of the Hungarian National Gallery in the Curia building, where they were stored at the time. Those drawings, which once lay forgotten in various cabinets, are now on display in the ground floor room of the National Gallery, in the company of some of the best European Avant-garde graphic art. (Of course, it would be nice if we could occasionally see these drawings even after the present exhibition is over.) The well-designed bilingual catalogue and pamphlet deserve special credit. The exhibition was highly appreciated by critics and the public alike. ❧

Endre Kukorelly

Fairy Vale, or Riddles of the Human Heart

(Excerpt)

Chapter IV. Money

1944 1947 1951 1956 1962 1969 1977 1986 1995 money

Sometimes I dip into
my diary
H-
ardly credible things, melancholy,
wittier,
stupid,

you'd not credit.
I
don't credit
things that once were
and
what not,

lean and hungry, there's
stuff I
don't even get,
stuff that, even more so, was roughly
so. By and large
that's the measure.

For instance, let's take this:
1995,
December
the sixth. Otherwise I
quickly forget it all. A person,
f'gets.

that's why there's this, put it this way,
a system that
stuff springs to
mind that will straight off
be forgotten all over
again,

emotions, that carried me
far away just as
I mean-
while took care of 4 or 5
bits of business, set about
five penny-ante things.

Endre Kukorelly

first appeared on the literary scene in 1984. Since then he has established himself as a leading member of his generation, having published 15 volumes, all poetry and short pieces of fiction. His latest, published in 2003, of which the above has been excerpted, is a fictionalised autobiography of 370 pages, an account of growing up in Kádár's Hungary.

1

The two-forint coin is a pretty yellowy-browny-gold, it also has a bit of weight. If you toss it up, it can decide, it selects which face to fall on. On the hottest days we didn't go to the Danube but in by the suburban branch line, towards Pest, to the Pünkösdfürdő Pools. The row of poplars planted by the fence would block the sun, the blanket would continually have to be pulled further over on account of the shade; the places that stayed in the sun until evening were instantly bagged. The shade slowly marched on.

The shade slithered along the grass, the Pünkösdfürdő Pools had a redolence of plane- and lime-trees, the redolence seemingly retaining the warmth. An odour of lime-trees, rose-bushes and chlorinated water, concrete ping-pong tables at the back, behind the rose bower, the concrete table tops would be hot by the afternoon. Sometimes of a Sunday the whole family would make the trip; those times we would try to find a better place, not too near the pool, but not too far either. I would stand in the queue for frankfurters.

I bought frankfurters and a Travellers' Relief Drink, standing in the queue by the beer kiosk, the red cinders strewn in front of the buffet roasting my soles, which was good, each thing separately was good, indeed flawless, family, right. In the outdoor café we ordered fried pork with rice. With rice, because it was either rice or else boiled potatoes.

Tomato salad with onion. Dad played with a penholder grip, Mummy would sweep away as if she were on a tennis court, the ball would fly off into the Michaelmas daisies. Sometimes the loudspeaker would come on: they were waiting for so-and-so by the tannoy. But then where's the tannoy, one might ask. Once whilst playing football I stepped on a wasp, though fortunately it was late afternoon by then, not long before closing time.

2

They closed at seven o'clock, but we didn't wait for that. The Pools shut down too mournfully, the female announcer would be agitated, fed up with the whole thing; on one occasion, for instance, she said into the microphone, after announcing: we advise our guests that it's closing time—she clearly forgot to switch off—I've had a sodding basinful of this. Then switched off. She switched off afterwards, you could hear the click.

She quickly switched on again and said she was sorry: We offer our guests our apologies for that, but nothing cheered up, the lido guests didn't laugh. I would be left with four forints from a ten-forint note: entrance to the lido, train tickets, and still two bronze-brown two-forint coins. A salami roll was two forints, a Travellers' Relief Drink also two. The tenner with Sándor Petőfi on it.

Banknotes are pictures. These drawings are clumsy, meticulous and not ludicrous. The GDR mark with Walter Ulbricht is not a bit ludicrous but deadly seri-

ous. The 1962 twenty-zloty denomination is so ugly that its ugliness is splendid. A spinach-green zloty, of State splendour, depicting a (probably) foundryman. Dream-state splendid, state flag, arms, state denominations, boring, depressing and reassuring. On the Frankfurt am Main 1st August 1995 five-hundred German mark note is to be seen Maria Sybilla Merian, obviously a biologist, depicted with some sort of mosquito or grasshopper-like creature, undergrowth in the background. The twenty-mark is sorrel-coloured, serial number AS7647216Y1, with Anette von Droste-Hülshoff. A green-locked Anette threaded through with a counter-forgery metal strip, a goose feather on the reverse of the note.

I hopped on one foot along the access road to the Békásmegyer-Pünkösdfürdő suburban train stop. Strips of maize on either side of the road, on the way home we'd always break off a few cobs, and Grandma would cook them that evening. Get off at Békásmegyer now and imagine strips of maize being there!

Wheat, rape, imagine anything there, any image is better. I can do that, I fantasise readily, I easily imagine sunflowers, I demolish the housing estate, it disintegrates of its own accord, and I stick back the commercial crops. The rest of the lido visitors waited on the other side, on the far platform, everyone was travelling to Pest, not me.

The opposite direction. I envied them, no denying it, they were going in, and I wasn't going in. That was the difference. I was envious, I suppose.

Not a lot, just a trace, and it didn't cross my mind or whatever, did not occur, that I might also go in. Take it into my head to walk over the rails to the opposite platform and board the train heading for Margaret Bridge, simple as that, no need even to make a decision. You don't spend time making your mind up, just do it. The sole of my foot was thoroughly swollen, it had ballooned in the gym shoe, I couldn't stand on it. It would be good to be home, it would have been good if Mother were there.

And did something, winkled out the thorn, she's a dab hand anyway at this sort of thing, always sets about healing with the greatest air of confidence, nothing easier it seems, she sorts it out, gives me no time to tip over into snivelling. She probes around, rubs in the ointment, bandages it, and done, there's no mucking around, no comforting one, with her the sympathy waveband is not fine-tuned.

At least she would bind a wet towel round it. The suburban train station at Szentistván Settlement was packed with people when I hobbled off, at first all I noticed was that loads of people were hanging about on the platform. Then I saw that alongside the rail they were just fitting a headless corpse into some kind of narrow coffin. The head too was there, a few paces away, a white-haired man's head. Beside it a battered leather attaché case, his papers, wallet, this and that, in a plastic bag. Stevie Leveczki was sitting on the bench in front of the station building, chin resting on his bike frame. Burglar, bugger him. Your burglar's busted, he growled.

He motioned with his eyes. Chopped in two, like a beetle. Just from experience. Experience is all there is.

At the Leveczkis, you have to know, there were Colorado beetles crawling about in the vegetable plot, all around their house, particularly at the foot of the house wall; they toiled up the cracks in the bricks and quarry stones, clinging to the bumps of the mortar, then from a certain height, due to their weight, they plopped onto the concrete.

As if running across the wall were a stripe, visible only to them, from which it was compulsory to drop back. We would gather the bugs in a coffee box, shake them, and toss them to the hens. Brown cardboard mocha packets with a loosely pantalooned Saracen boy painted on the side, the bugs rattling in the box like beans. The Leveczkis must have something up with their lungs, they're always coughing, can't come out to play football, and aren't even allowed out much on the street either.

Stevie's mother locks him in the house and goes off to work, but Stevie scrambles out of the upper window in a trice, a few nifty moves, and pants proudly. They have a lie-down every afternoon, never coming out to the lido or the Danube, compulsory post-lunch sleep, with the window shutters lowered, when one can't go over to their place. They have a problem of some kind.

That's how Leveczki put it, on account of the early bedtime problem. They don't even switch the light on, though it could be the electricity isn't yet installed at their place either. One morning, while the potato-bug hunt was on, Leveczki's sister trapped me in the corner of their kitchen.

She stopped in front of me, stretched out her skinny arms and pushed me up against the wall, her palms pressing my shoulders, saying nothing, a serious look on her face, from real close. This close, with rounded eyes. What does she want.

What to make of that.

Well, I didn't fancy her that much, that's for sure. We stood like that for a while, I didn't fancy that in the least. Not Magdi Leveczki, but that whole performance with the wedging in. I reckon those things can very easily be separated, Magdi and the wedging-in, detach a girl from the wedging-in. You separate and sort it out, but not as though you know what it is that is sorted out from that detaching. I fancied Magdi. She had nice breasts, it was mainly the breasts I fancied.

The sun was shining in my eyes, I saw nothing, to exaggerate a bit. I was frightened, and I don't think it was of Magdi, but I was frightened of what next. And why it lasts so short a time.

Every Sunday Leveczki served at the eleven o'clock mass. Stevie did at any rate, God knows what Magdi did in the meantime; on those occasions they hurried off past our garden in their Sunday best without a greeting, not even glancing in, so wrapped up were they, it seems, with that mass.

The mass, that absorbed them, and it would no doubt absorb me too, I ought to go, I wonder: should I attend church on Sunday morning? Mother doesn't at-

tend, my grandmother cooks and meanwhile runs through the church service in her head, my dad doesn't go either, that's the set-up, we're pagans it seems, I ought to ask them.

What's the score, paganism or what, I might ask them, I could have talked to them about the matter, the thing with God. We shake the bugs from the box, tip them over onto their backs, they saw away with outspread chitin wings, trying to turn over onto their toes. I toss them into the hen-house. The hen stabs its beak hard into the beetle, splitting it in two with a single blow. It cocks its head to the side, strikes with closed eyes with such force that it drills its beak into the hard-tamped ground.

It could be I took fright at that girl.

The potato bugs clicked. The kids copped a fillér for each one from their old man. Showed the beetles, a rough count was done, then sprinkled them in front of the hens.

3

I rarely went to the pools but rather rode my bike down to the river bank, that cost nothing. The other lads likewise went to the Danube, no doubt they had no money. We didn't either. I would get eight forints for going to the Pools. At the weekends a tenner, and if I went to the Pünkösfürdő Pools another four forints on top. The Csillaghegy Pools are more expensive, but there the done thing is not to pay for admittance, you climb in at a place at the back where holes in the fence have been formed for the purpose.

Sometimes they wire the entry up, knot the barbed wire together, but the punters would undo them straight away. That would be us. There is always someone who fixes it, and always someone who unfixes it, so that it can be done and undone all over again.

So the powers-that-be should again have something to repair, that's the game, round and round like a merry-go-round, and I can't believe there isn't some kind of in-built motor that the authorities, if the fancy takes them, switch on and off from on high. You slip through a gap in the barbed wire and they are already patching it up; that is what anything consists of, this kind of switching-on and hiding. And patching. The Csillaghegy Pools are cool and the water ice-cold due to all the shade. The main pool is full of girls, toe-dabbling and squealing are the done thing, out-shrilling the dance music, they float and flail around, it's impossible to swim properly—not worth it either, that's true.

Still, it's worth copping a look, if you're lucky, you can peek down the bikini tops. The girls never go down, for some reason, to the Danube. The Danube is different.

To start with its being smelly. "In the Danube swims a fish, a brown trout and the biggest jobs". There are no girls, but I've already said that, not one of them on the bank, just this overpowering river smell. Though I did sometimes see

girls too, scullers and kayakers, as they rowed upstream to the upper tip of Szentendre Island, or lying back in the boat as they drifted with the current back to the boathouses, in the direction of the Roman Baths shore. Without bras on.

I'm reading, look up, and that one has no bra on either, but—shame—she has already drifted past for ever, immediately blocked out for good by the willows. I grind away on my bike in the raspberry field in front of the occupational therapy institution, on the way to the bank, when all at once the river air assails me.

A whiff of summer. Sun, fish, oil and mud, riparian vegetation, rotting tree trunks, the rust smell of sluggish barges swimming against the tide, that's what there is, and these all have immeasurable power. The locals are familiar with trails along the bank, everyone knows these places, tracks besides inlets and shallows, passages amongst the bushes. There are those who aren't familiar with them, because they aren't locals; if you aren't familiar, you aren't a local. Anyone who isn't a local gets caught up by the bushes, devoured to a rash of bumps by mosquitoes, bitten by every horsefly in existence, treads on shards of glass, gets his sandals lodged in the mud.

Has his bicycle vanish.

His bicycle propels itself down the bank at its steepest part into the river. I'm familiar. I'm fairly familiar with the area by now, my bike doesn't propel itself, my towel doesn't vanish, I don't leave one of my Vietnamese flip-flops there. Admittedly, however, the mosquitoes bite me all over.

The horseflies too, though not the whole lot. Not all of them, I sense if one alights on me, I know how hard to swat the horsefly so as not to splatter it apart.

If you aren't a local you can't intervene, they don't ask you what you want, they didn't ask, so don't want; if you were foolish enough to pipe up anyway, they wouldn't listen.

They would look straight through you, there's no-one to speak to. Maybe it's not like that, but that's what I feel, and when I don't feel it, it's not like that. If I feel it, that's how it is. I join in but still don't intervene; even if I'm there, it's none of my business, local affairs, and only with many years going by do I feel that perhaps they are mine too, always towards the end of the summer, but by the next summer again not.

I can start all over again, from the very beginning, the kid doesn't even recognise me. What's up, don't you lot recognise me? Yes, he does recognise me, picks me first for his team, he knows the whole score, even though a second or two ago he was looking right through me as if I had fallen out of who knows what. Now he fits me back in, and it seems I fit back in straight off. I don't talk to them about this, they don't say, I don't ask, we wouldn't understand anyway, from one moment to the next it carries on from where it left off last year. I carried on, they had nothing to leave off.

I carry on, yet it's different, slightly different each year, relationships have changed in the meantime, this and that shifted a bit, those are things I have

missed out on totally, I myself have to find a place again in the change. Which works virtually at once incidentally, better than you would think, since to them I'm just a Budapester after all, they have no choice but to have something to do with me.

Because at the same time I am not a Budapester in that way. Like the ones we play football against at the Pünkösdfürdő Pools, mercilessly kicking one another's shins to bits. Even the change in power relations is speedily noticeable without any particular discussion, nor do we discuss it, because what would there be to say. What would I say, and what could they reply, they live there whereas I, and at times like this it seems odd to me too, I'm on my summer holiday. The summer is the same, everything is the same, except that I'm on my summer holiday and they aren't—that's the difference.

Still, it is a difference. So then it's not the same. That is summer, that is not life. To fish they regularly go down to a tucked-away inlet facing Luppa Island, the best place, a stretch of riverbank densely overgrown with bushes, their territory, tucked away for them, it was more or less they who tucked it away there. At this time of day, in the morning, they don't have the time as they work during the day. They have to work, and I'm so, so how it goes is I take my book and a towel down with me in a net shopping bag and sit out on the bank to read. I don't ask where they are working, the hoeing, that sort of thing, I suppose, or digging, because they are peasants.

That hoeing is not something they say, the main thing is that I can't go over there. They don't blab to me what work they do, whereas I don't go over there because why would I go over there, to say nothing of where. Obviously the co-op, that's where they hoe. Stumpy fingers, worn-down, earth-black-rimmed nails—those lads have broad hands.

Their hands are simply a lot bigger than mine. They work with their parents, they don't talk about that, and I, though interested, don't ask what. Interested? I'm interested but not all that much, they dig or whatever. Thinning out.

They hoe from the morning in the blazing sun, dig over the vegetable plot, whatever is necessary, pluck maize cobs in a work gang. Work gangs, that's something they seem to talk about among themselves sometimes. Before noon I'm on my own, that's for sure, at such times it's not that I'm not a local, but somehow vaguely because I am not involved in precisely those things. In the afternoon, getting on towards dusk—yes, it's a different game, because Görögcs passes the ball, and if he's playing against me, I tackle him, he passes or I gain possession, and no mistake. The neck and nape of those peasant lads is burnt coal-black. Beneath the undershirt they're wax-white.

They strip down and wade into the Danube, with their wax-white backs and sun-blackened scruffs of the neck it's as if they had left their sweatshirts on. The way these peasant boys swim over to the island, holding their heads high out of the water, like dogs.

They come out, shake themselves and immediately put their shirts on, don't wait to dry off, they're ashamed or whatever. Leap onto their bikes in their sopping-wet satiny shorts and clank off home along the dirt path. I almost murdered one of them once.

His name was Krizsán, the same age as me, a year or two older if that, precocious, strong and aggressive. The bigger lads sometimes give one another a kicking, that's their way of scrapping, they don't wrestle but kick one another until one of them is floored. He then gets a few more, not a lot, a couple of boots and the scrap is over. The game stops, one knocks the other down, no knowing why, I've no idea.

Over age-old matters, things I'm not privy to. I wasn't involved in this kind of stuff, as if they were loath to do so in front of me, a Budapester, because that's still all I am to them. Though it's never said up-front like that, it makes not a blind bit of difference during the game, and nothing is important outside the game anyway, but still I sense that may be the reason. Pest—that's a serious reason. If I were to ask, they'd say; they would have said for sure, but I didn't ask.

Yet it did interest me. They're in the same team, the game's in progress, everything apparently in order, then one passes a comment and the other one instantly lashes out. Smacks a fist straight in the face. I was coming home from the Danube with this Krizsán, back towards the settlement, on the path between the maize fields. That sort of thing almost never happened, I always went on my own to the riverbank. Never with him.

As a rule he didn't even play football. In places the path vanishes, overgrown by weeds, then near the main road it suddenly widens, there's a bunch of places by the path where the Gypsies have cleared the maize crop. They turn onto the path, load up the forage rack, yanking the maize out by the roots in a circle so the horses can haul the cart round. Krizsán is going on ahead, slows down, turns round and walks backwards, that's how he talks to me. At the clearing he stops, waits for me. I could kill you dead easy, he says.

He produces this jack-knife from his pocket, opens it, brandishes it in front of me. They won't find you here, you know. I'd drag you in there, he indicates, indicates where with his head, so I drag you in, and that's it, I go off home. They'll find you in the autumn, or maybe the Gypsies will find you earlier, but they won't dare to say anything, they'll keep stumm in case they are fitted up. He laughs too. They'll think the remedial patients did it as a lark. They'll pin it on the Gypsies, see. That's bollocks, I tell Krizsán, pretending I'm not scared. He's a lot taller than me, and even if it's not all that much, I see it as a lot, and if I was to start running, he would probably catch up, he is more familiar with the byways along the bank. Back towards the river, among the remedial patients.

He turns back round and carries on walking, scything the maize stems with his old man's horn-handled jack-knife. Bollocks, pal. Wisps of smoke to the south, bone-dry, mid-August vegetation, the roofs of the settlement's houses are

visible from here. He stops by a pile of bricks to take a leak. I squat to tie the laces on my gym shoe and pick up a half-brick from the ground.

If he goes on, I'll smash it into his head. Gets any closer, or starts anything. A wider clearing in the maize field, the chimneys of the outlying houses along the main road to Szentendre, a crone dressed in black leaning on her bicycle; Krizsán turns round and walks backwards, grinning. When he spots what I have in my hand he wipes the grin off his face. My thumb is bleeding: I cut it open on the edge of the brick. I was only kidding, he says, easy does it, you don't mean you fell for all that, for fuck's sake?

4

I was frightened of the remedial patients. The path to the river took one that way, through the ploughed lands belonging to the occupational therapy place, far away from the buildings, but still one went in between those barracks to the bank. Yes, but for some reason I'm frightened. Everyone is scared of them, it's not advisable to go near them, you never can tell, can you. They would hang about among the bushes, in the shade of the apple trees, well wrapped up even in the heat, their padded jackets buttoned up to the neck, their ear-flapped caps pulled down low on the brow, lolling about, scratching, staring blankly. Whisking the flies away.

Remedial patients, which is to say loonies. Old-timers and retarded on top, their mouths constantly gaping and, so it was said, continually screwing. They screw all the time, each and every one with everyone else, it's common knowledge, all the women get shagged several times a day, even the oldest, in between which they check one another out, and if strangers should pass that way, apparently, I don't know because I don't look that way, they flash their willies. All that could be seen was that they were flaked out in the shade, that's how the nutters took a rest.

They rested from who knows what. I, in any event, didn't look anywhere, I looked straight ahead, at the path, lest the wheel bump against the kerb. I made out that I wasn't shit scared, yet I was shit scared as I finally pedalled at full speed among them, down to the bank, though they didn't so much as look at me. They weren't to be seen close to the bank. They're afraid of water, no doubt.

A good job too, the idiots, thank God, are afraid of water, that was comforting. Not completely, though I no longer rightly know, it's possible that I'm only afraid now. I reassured myself with the thought that if they were to come at me, to start running after me, I would cycle into the river.

One time I went to the Sárosis' to hoe weeds. Before the footie Tibi mentioned that his father would pay ten forints, did I feel like it, money for jam. They gave me a shout at dawn, I was already wide awake through excitement. Manual labour, hard physical, I was going to make some money.

Like anyone else, the other kids in the settlement, paid in work units. The Sárosis had a separate piece of land, their own, not the co-op's, a few long strips of land out on the far side of the elevation behind the railway tracks, over towards the Csajerszke. I haven't been this way before, now I'm plodding along here, hoe on shoulder and a touch of pride to boot. The air is cool, almost cold, the sun has just slipped up over the crowns of the trees, the sandy soil is still damp, the bushes dew-laden. When I reached the end of a row, I could drink half a lid of water.

They had brought a tin can of water with them, and we drank from the lid. I'm doing what they do, I'm working for pay, I drink their water, they brought it, us together, communal drinking water, I was mingling with them. The water gradually warmed up. The main thing is on no account to hoe out any of the crop itself. Occasionally I hoe one out then quickly stuff it back, smooth down the earth around it, and hope no-one will notice. How good life is.

What?

Life is good.

I sat under a bramble thicket and endeavoured to straighten out my palms. A good life, admittedly the others are way ahead; they pay me no attention, I'm lagging a long way behind in the line. Why? Was I supposed to keep up? They didn't say I should, there wasn't a word about tempo. The water's warm as a puddle, tastes of iron, and a bunch of sand has got into it, it's crunching between my teeth.

My teeth were crunchy from it. At the sweet shop in Budakalász one could get lemon ice-cream, delicious, semi-molten, slightly bitter, watery-tasting scoops, sometimes strawberry ice and raspberry too. I didn't spend the money. I didn't buy the bicycle that I would have liked to have.

Headlamp, calliper brake, gears, adjustable saddle with a small leather tool-kit bag. You tip the dynamo pulley onto the wheel with the toe-cap of your shoe. I didn't buy any ice-cream either. Once or twice, or not at all. I didn't buy any Travellers' Relief Drink at the lido but drank from the tap; I munched my bread-and-butter with yellow pepper and drank water with it. I purchased a Travellers' Relief and drank it super-slowly.

I drink slowly and it's finished in one go, make a start and that's it, a sip. It's ten forints for the hoeing, but Sárosi didn't inform me beforehand whether that's for one hour or how much, or how many rows have to be hoed. We went home at noon, and I got seventeen forints. Money makes me bashful, because it signifies the sort of thing that I'm actually loath to show. Sadly, money signifies me, the more diffident me, a whole lot of stuff about me, whilst to others, almost everyone—me almost entirely. I take into account what I signify to others.

To others, through money, I signify anything, because what I do is endeavour to switch to what they're doing, and they have to agree to that beforehand. If they agree, that's the money, you go along with it, that's what you produce. If I have no money, they don't like me.

It's not even possible for them to like me, because I do nothing, don't take so much as a step, which is why I have no money, that's it, by and large. You want to be liked, then take a few steps, go through at least one or two motions that also suit others. If you have no money, you get—take this literally now—stuck, you've been stuck with this one thing, you end up definitively separate from others, unable even to move away from there. I endeavour to avoid anyone who has no money. Anyone who has no money stinks.

He has a strange smell, not the same as that of others. He dozes on the metro carriage seat, lurching like a sack of potatoes between Újpest and Kőbánya stations, only waking up at the end of the line to relieve himself between the rails, other people pulling away from him due to the stench. You don't spot him straight off, however, you sometimes sit down next to one of them, then when you see what he is, when you've noticed, you promptly stand up and move away from there. Some people even get off immediately, pulling discreet grimaces as they step over to the next carriage. You see what sort of person he is, because he has no money.

When I have no money I don't concern myself with other people, I don't give a damn about them, I have to have money. I'm not indifferent, I need to have a place, and that place is among the others. I may not like them perhaps. For sure I don't, I'm sick of the sight of them, I speak to them in a forced way in some foreign and trite idiom, meanwhile eyeing their salami sandwiches, but I join in and marvel at them. Do they appeal to me? I don't tell them they bore me.

I'm bored with you, there's no chance of my saying that kind of thing. Someone always turns up who appeals as well, and there are some whom I truly like. I like them, miss them, it's hard for me to part from there, or them, I go back just for a short while, just in case some grub or beer was left, and I often discover that I'm the last one left.

I stay to the last so as not to be alone. I'm saying this to those who are able to follow. They follow, though I make no move of any kind. I speak to those who are capable of loafing about like this, as stupidly as me, so bereft, amidst all kinds of seemingly happy things. It's summer, nothing is moving, I'm sitting outside on a deck-chair under our apple-tree, scribbling on the unused pages of my squared-paper maths exercise book; if someone comes by, I break off.

People come over, I cover-up, shut the exercise book, shove my book over it. A woodpecker is hammering on the walnut-tree, rattling like a piece of wood caught in a fan. If no-one comes, I work, when I'm alone, that is my work. In the summer of 1962, on the platform of the suburban train station, I saw the headless body of an elderly man—approximately ever since then. I saw a man's head separately, but I didn't really pay attention, I was hurrying home, my foot hurt. I didn't stop, didn't give a look over there, partly because I was scared, partly because the sole of my foot hurt like blazes. I also had a temperature. I hardly gave it a look, but I still saw the whole thing. Rigid.

Not the details. No details.

That's why I scooted off from there so, er yes, lightning-fast, as if it did not interest me, I'd had enough of it, even that much were sufficient for me never to be free of it. A chap got off the suburban train, strolled to the end of the train, placed his briefcase beside him, bent down as if he were about to tie up his shoelaces, then, when both conductors had stepped back from the boarding steps, lay prone on the platform and stuck his head between the wheel and the rail.

I went back after it had grown dark. I was better by then and, it seems, it interested me after all. But there was nothing there by then. Roughly that. A shrill croaking of frogs. That's how quickly it's spirited away, something absorbs it.

5

When I was a child I was often alone. I didn't know about this distinctly like that, or to put it better, I no doubt knew that I was alone, but that belonged to it, at all events that's how the alone and you are belong together. I didn't suspect how this was all so, I don't know what further description to add, what richer predicate to use, boring. I wasn't bored because I had no clue about how I should be alone, I was just alone. The others were working.

My parents were in Pest, at their workplaces, Grandma was soaking my socks in the wash tub, making a fire in the stove, pressing seed onions into the turned soil, cooking lunch, sending me to the shop for bread. She somehow managed to get me to do that. She washes the plates with a brisk clinking in a basin. My mates at the settlement grafted every day in order to have money. Not me.

I go to the shop, tops, bike over for mineral water—not what you could call work. I have no money, nor is it important that there should be, without it whatever works out is worked out; the ones who need money work, I therefore have no need. If I work, that is probably on account of money. Just for money, it's crude put that way, sounds vile, I might write this sort of thing down, write it down maks, but not say it out loud. X. Ks, fikşed, I've written it down, because this is the situation, yet even so I don't think so at all.

Out of prudence, though it could be this is how I get my pay-back. We are used to thinking up all kinds of things and then not blurting them out but neatly shooing them away from ourselves, the word shooing having been hit on expressly for that thinking-up. I'm ashamed to speak ill of others, that too is on account of money, money is what rules it, because if the person in question is floundering before your eyes, are you going to look at them and tell them?

Like: don't take it amiss, but you're too small for me. When I decide for some reason, on account of a bloody-awful upbringing one's in the habit of deciding things like I'll speak my mind frankly—that makes disproportionate demands. Too close to tell, sweltering, my back becomes sweaty and it drags on hopelessly long. For I don't give up, since I already gave up when I started. I blush. You flushed.

The reason for the blushing is money. Infinitesimally short, brutally to-the-point sentences. To tell others one's frankly poor opinion, nothing comes of that, on top of which it does everyone in indiscriminately. I find it bad, that way it doesn't meet my needs, so one doesn't speak, I don't stop to talk with them, don't stomach it, because I don't take it from them, won't buy that sort of thing purely out of politeness.

Or I buy it purely out of politeness, out of tact, and promptly dump it in the first doorway. You're acquainted with those moves when, after some hesitation, you stick something on the dustbin lid rather than tossing it in, just in case it comes in handy for someone else. I don't know by the way what's with this sparing, who it is I'm sparing by doing this, and why not myself, but all the same, why should I tell them that what they have is vile, lousy. Is it certain it's vile?

Could be that it's not so vile. But then again it's vile for sure, since it's me who gets to decide what's vile.

My money decides, money says so, because what the money goes on is good for certain, at least during that brief moment. For example, I'll give you this stupid example, Travellers' Relief really was good, the money would really have liked it a lot to be laid out on that.

It would have liked to rush out, be laid out without thinking, that would have been worth it. It's laid out because it's worth it, and if it's not worth it, then not. Or Ischler biscuits. On the way to school, where I turn out of Izabella Street onto Andrássy Avenue, a coffee aroma billows out from Lukács's, the confectioner's. Mingled with cake. That always worked, it billowed continually, the aroma was produced continuously, and I always went by there, I wouldn't have been able to anywhere else, because should I go out of my way, a street nearer the Vörösmarty Street Girls' School, on that account? I didn't go in and I didn't go out of my way, and that's when the Ischlers surged through the vents.

Linzers, Dobosch torte, Tátra meltaways, rum-punch petit fours. Once a year, after the year-end speech-day ceremony, when school reports were handed out, we would go into the Lukács café with our parents to have an ice-cream. We make our way down to the basement, walnut-hued wainscoting, clouds of cigarette smoke, the thimbleful of soda water that came with the ice-cream. The very fact of its being Lukács's, the confectioner's.

The Lukács isn't abolished for good, it's just that right now, as it happens, they have brought in people's democracy for eternity, which is why Specialities is inscribed in the oval frame over the entrance, in the same Art Nouveau lettering. The revolving door metes out the aromas as two platinum-grey old dames totter in, rouged up to the eyeballs, expelling several door-compartmentsful of intense coffee aroma onto the street. The cakes are delivered in aluminium trays to other not-so-special places, the barely cooled French creams shuddering in a corpse-carrier pan on a Soviet GAZ slab. Lots of French Creams trembling. There would have been a lot to seriously lament about in front of the Specialities confectioner's.

Which no one called that, we called it the Lukács; my mum would never let any other name pass her lips in place of the old ones, reactionary to the core, she never wavers on that, though admittedly it's impossible to say out loud nonsense like Specialities, or People's Republic Avenue and November the Seventh Square, in any decent way.

The Oktogon, and that's all. Opposite the confectioner's is the district police station, a constable posted on the pavement in the chocolatey fumes, keeping his eye on a tray of however many Johnny Rigós. A few steps past the police station, beyond Aradi Street, is a tobacconist's and, at the corner of our road, a branch of the Laundry Co., where we took our bed linen to be washed. Blackened edifices, stucco pealing from the walls: the houses are decaying all along Izabella Street.

All the houses in the back streets. From time to time they put up scaffolding on one or another, there's no knowing why, the courtyard corridors and balconies are underpinned and left that way for years. After lessons, I mess around with Gézus Kajtár, Georgie Onodi, and Barta in front of the tobacconist's, then, when we start to get tired of that, it's off home, that's the route every day. I hurry home, I'm hungry, and it's ribbon noodles with poppy seed for lunch. Maybe I'm not so hungry after all.

I'm hungry, but it's going to be ribbon noodles with poppy seed, with the castor sugar strictly rationed, already divulged in advance it comes to mind, and I'm no longer quite so hungry, it deserts me, that's how it goes. Awfully flat, no surprise—true, no one said anything about surprises, there's nothing shot-in-the-dark. It's possible they're going to bring a newer model of Soviet-manufactured trolley-buses into service; that too showers sparks when it jumps points, the electric motor in it whirrs just as menacingly.

As in any of the earlier models. It howls its motor if one of the current collectors jumps off the cable on the points at the Szondi Street turn-off, where the No. 76 line goes its separate way from the No. 73, no big surprise. Our school is next door to Lukács's, the confectioner's, but by and large we never went in. Still, we might have gone in sometimes nonetheless.

In a text even merrier than this, I would have gone in to pack in some Rigó slices.

6

The Investment Bank means I was able to visit the bank. My dad's workplace, a smell of paper, ladies' perfume, men leisurely smoking cigarettes in the corridors; they invest and all that stuff, heavy-duty financial affairs. He kept coloured pencils in his drawer, on my account I reckon, one Elephant India rubber and stamps as well, Invbank seals, I'd get purple all over my fingers. Wooden panelling on the walls of the corridor, solemn tobacco-brown hues, it was sometimes permitted to type, when one of the secretaries was out of the room. You

take the paternoster lift up to the fifth floor, but you don't step out, scary: it's written in red lettering on a back-lit glass plate that the last floor follows, please alight, and we don't.

Before it reaches the head of the lift shaft they give a warning, you have no business going further, higher, it's out of order, this is the limit, strictly forbidden to pass, in red letters with an exclamation mark, alight or you have only yourself to blame, they have told you, somewhat menacingly, it's not just a fairy story. But my little sister and I clung together in the compartment, grasping the legs of our dad's trousers and waiting for what would happen, but nothing did.

What happened was nothing happened, the contraption turned round with a squeaking, and it was incomprehensible why we weren't standing on our heads. That's when I understood, not before, and even afterwards I didn't entirely understand. I grasped what was happening, yet in all truth we still ought to have been standing on our heads at the turn-round, because isn't that what a turn-round is? Or stay there and step out of the compartment at the last floor.

You span the limit and instantly come back. The boss leaves the room, whereupon Auntie Erzsi or whoever opens a drawer, produces her comb, squeezes out a little lipstick and, setting her round mirror in front of her, daubs her mouth dark red with unbelievably meticulous care. The tip of the lipstick slips out like the prick of a dog in a rutting mood.

She tightens her lips, purses them by pressing between her teeth, but only slowly pursing, slowly and now very much, because she is already made up, just touching up. She leaves off the touching-up, presses her lips together. Some red sticks to her teeth.

She adjusts her bra, adjusts her stockings. She doesn't concern herself with me, fortunately, she only concerns herself with me if the boss is in the room, though then too she is obviously concerning herself with the boss, who is my dad. No matter, I don't concern myself with her either, I'm able to put on a show of not looking when she is titivating. When she is titillating. I watch her in such a way as not to, because I'm drawing a besieged castle, Turks unsuccessfully besieging the Hungarians, I make out that Erzsi is not exciting. I don't even see her.

The way she pokes in a thumb under her bra, reaches in lightning-fast, lifts away the whale-bone frame, releases the stale air. She lifts it away, lets it drop back, away, back, the bits quiver, the knockers knock. The surrounds too, whalebone and rib bone. My willy gets a hard-on. Do you believe that the person who reclines his head on a Fairy Mound cannot lie still? I don't believe so, but I do know that when my head bends to your bosom I am roused too strongly for sleep to fall on my eyes. I went out to the washroom.

You step out into the corridor, look for the men's room, because you need a leak but you can't—get round that somehow, old pal. At half-time during a match once, in the toilets at the Népstadion, that's where it happened for the first time, I was unable to pee for excitement, though I desperately needed to.

It would be good if I could because, for one thing, I came here to take a leak, then for another, the second half has started ages ago and—nothing.

There I was, standing in the stench in a urinal, and it wouldn't go, though not due to the stench.

Due to the excitement. Full ground, the concrete terraces groaning, whilst I would be well advised to slash on that tarred wall as soon as possible. I all too readily get a stand, very easily and haphazardly, it's all sheer chance, which is good and also bad. Then later, no matter, the whole thing grows on you. There are two different endings, so indeterminably comely and homely, depending solely on memory. And on what does memory depend?

7

At home we had much the same sort of porcelain as in Lukács's, the confectioner's. In the corner of the cabinet stood my mother's Zsolnai porcelain lace doll, among Herend bonbonières, animal figures and Mattie the Gooseboy. A piglet plays the accordion very amusingly on a round lace doily, because on top of everything there were also these crocheted doilies. Now, one was not allowed to touch this doll, because the situation with the doll was that, sadly, it was crumbling.

Rampantly at that. You touched it and a chunk of porcelain dust promptly detached from it at the most unexpected places. Even if you didn't touch it, it fell apart of its own accord, the lace dress occasionally shed itself, crumbled, though admittedly that did not do much to alter the doll's so-called prettiness. The doll was pretty, you see.

From a certain point of view. Elegant lace flaws, exquisite, ruined and acquiescent, it resembled that brassière-hitcher in the bank, Auntie—I no longer remember who. Erzsi. A ripped-dress prettiness, so pretty it is ugly, in any event annoying. The cabinet annoyed me in principle, because why do we have a cabinet with lace.

Why the cabinet. And the lace.

On one successful dusting a more substantial chunk dropped off the evening gown and the decision was made to sell the doll. I didn't like the doll, the dusting annoyed me and I was glad to see it sold, yet there was still an air of solemnity about the decision. Grandma cooked semolina pudding every week.

Semolina pudding was a fixed item on the Wednesday menu, you were already preset for it when you got back home, that's how you woke up in the morning—disenchanting. So was there something to become disenchanted with? I would eat mustard with the semolina so it would be a bit more of a surprise, have any taste at all. I was prepared for it to taste vile, but not vile for being vile, more for having no taste, that's what was vile about it.

It was still atrocious with mustard, so it was beyond hope, there was no solution. Semolina is dry, pappy sand, it soaks up the saliva, one can take a dread-

fully long time eating semolina pud, a lot of chewing and champing, I dislodge it, shift it around, use the mouth until it finally gums up, then gulp the gob down in one.

Or in two, if I'm able to bite it in two. From time to time we sold one or other of the better pieces from the inheritance to the State Pawnship, and on such occasions lunch would be a joint of roast meat, a bottle of wine, with love-letters for afters. It was—how would one put it?

Hopeless. Seven or eight freshly minted, brick-red hundred-forint notes, and then it would be a matter of bouillon that Sunday, obviously, followed by breaded cutlets and chipped potatoes or maybe cutlets with cheese. We have no money, it seems.

Appropriate family happiness, but not the money to go with it, not enough for happiness. My dad works in the bank, Mum for the Post Office Savings Bank. On one occasion, for some reason, the regime sharply pushed up the price of silver, and Dad stood in the queue at the State Pawnship, because one had to queue up into the bargain, and sold two of the lighter, un-monogrammed silver goblets out of the service, as well as a cigarette case. Somehow I recollect that transaction, and it's not a good feeling.

It's a lousy feeling.

We sold the doll for seven hundred forints, whilst another porcelain ornament; the Easter Aspersion, was squeezed into the doll's place, in the corner of the cabinet. The Easter Aspersion portrayed a peasant lad in wide breeches and waistcoat pouring a jug of water steadily—at least it was steady until the base dropped off and smashed to pieces during a spring-clean—down a girl's neck. Little red apron, bodice, a flaxen plait, pert little bosoms. If we had no money, then we didn't, we took note of the fact, there was no special lamentation, no melodrama.

Did we cheer up?

Probably not. A man's a machine. This machine gets up and goes to bed. It sits down at the table, speaks and holds its peace, gets pay-back, justifies, carries out its business, trots out what it knows, what is fed in, takes note, never forgets completely. It is inordinately fond of talking to itself. It yawns, strives, falls asleep nicely because it could cry. And cries bitterly.

It cries bitterly. He turns completely away from the inward direction, the path he should have followed in order truly to become a self. I trot out what I know at the press of a button. Function, eat, defecate, screw, work, joyous, bitter-sweet, then give up the ghost. The customary, hardly varying, resigned recognition, not particularly overdone but not overlooked either, of how little money we have. Porcelain services—yes, I found nothing surprising about that.

A Rosenthal service, painted Czech fruit dishes, commode and divan, truckle bed, silver coffee spoons, family this and that. The truckle bed simply means a bed insert, the bed settee and truckle bed, that's how we say it, that's the sort of

thing we say, don't ask me why. Trolley table with tea service, gilded cigarette case, monogrammed cigarette box, sets of the works of Sándor Márai and Ferenc Herczeg—why, other people have stuff like that.

Trolley table with four casters, no? The properties had all been kissed goodbye as it was, hadn't they, nothing to be said about that, Uncle Pepus put the patrimony into war bonds at the outbreak of the First World War, but after the Treaty of Trianon the bonds were worth a gold signet ring and a Swiss wristwatch—that was the inheritance. Four thousand acres, three zeros, the matter of properties was not often trotted out, in truth never, part of the game was not to speak about that sort of thing.

I don't know why: out of modesty or pride or because of the sheer futility, but that was the rule, the regulation so to say, I could reel off a whole list of things. Out of a general hopelessness that extended to just about everything. It all melted into thin air, zero, full stop, end of discussion, kissed goodbye, who now knows how.

They probably did know, only I didn't ask them. What the situation was. 'I'm going to D. now' (our other estate): 'I'll see how things are and do what I can there'. Not deliberately forgetting, merely not talking about it, not discussing it, a prim yet nonetheless suitable working family strategy, though not explicit of course. Written all over us is a profound conviction that it isn't necessarily proper to go on about such things, they vanish of their own accord anyway.

They do vanish too. Forgetting is the royal road: you don't think it through, don't write it down, you talk only about the most trivial, mundane matters, everything else just crumbles away like that porcelain lace—that's forgetting for you. We don't talk about it, then either it will become clear, or not. What is it about Jews in general, for instance, that gets our back up, because it's seemingly nothing specific—I would have been interested to know that.

What's the deal: separately decent, collectively not decent, or each one separately helpful but en masse out to do the dirty on you? Or is it the fact that, sad to say, when it comes down to it they're true-blue monarchists; that is to say, we, it gradually dawned on me, are true-blues, and I wasn't comfortable with that. Not true-blues for convenience, not even out of principle, not out of defiance or bloody-mindedness, not because it's due, simply because that's what we are, true-blues, out of habit; that's the way one was born, so one accepts it.

Why are we, I'm serious, such true-blues. Stiff bearing, long, aristocratic white cloak reaching right down to the horse's rump, plumed helmet, always being thrashed but always coming through in the end, though never at the very end—that's true-blue, that's how I saw them on the tellie. My dad rode horses from childhood on, his uncle had a racing stable, was a passionate horse... On the other hand, potato noodles again for lunch, semolina pudding at best, so judging by that it's now the very end. We are skint, reduced to scraping the very bottom of the semolina pud. They are working to no avail.

He works the whole day and till God knows what hour of the night, because he believes, that's what he must have been told, that's how he was brought up, that through work, unremitting, demeaning work that used up all his time and patience, any sort of work, he would earn enough money.

To support his family decently, to support us. An easy-going, worn-out, elegant true-blue officer, he would come back home, no helmet or silk cloak, change clothes, switch on the radio, start up the bobbin-winder, meanwhile putting the coffee percolator on, and set to it. Like that, every blessed day. Every goddamned day. But where did he get that from?

For one thing, let's start there, the money wasn't enough anyway, he should have known, not for anything, he ought to have tumbled to that; where did he get it from that it might be enough? That impassive exertion, then meanwhile the display-cabinet thing—was that not futile? Yes, futile, pointless his doing what it wasn't enough for, what it is best to yearn for, anything polished off this easily, put behind one this quickly, is anyway totally superfluous.

A Travellers' Relief is superfluous or, depending on the context, super-flewous. Money is ice-cold. Cold, a ferroconcrete fence, tightly woven wire netting around our garden. Territory belonging to us, a tiny piece of land, thus far mine, that part over there, from the row of lilacs, does not belong here, you don't step over.

Don't even step. I don't take a step. I don't understand why, but those are the boundaries, and it's as if the most appropriate boundaries were marked, suits us fine, I accept them, don't even want to change them. Money is an infuriating thing, maybe it preoccupies me so much because it is so infuriating. My parents worked for their money.

We work and something will come of it—that was the basis on which they did it, only nothing came of it, that's the problem. That's the basis. What did come of it was that they brought back from the market two kilos of blood oranges, really tasty, and they didn't tot up afterwards how long they had squatted in the cotton dust showering out from that bobbin-winding machine for those eight oranges.

In the fine fluff that uniformly coated the flat. Bananas were not to be had, and a good job too. We didn't talk about it, we didn't talk about money, and it was totally out of order in front of strangers, so when it came down to it I didn't really know what money signified, yet still it seemed, though maybe I am not seeing it right, as if that was what it was always about.

That is to say, precisely the fact that nothing was said about it, nothing explicit, the family's vocabulary cut off along a specific line, with us not employing certain words. So what words would we use? Gobble my goo—we wouldn't use words like that, those kinds of words would be used by Gypsies, Gypsy women would yell at one another whilst quarrelling on Rose Street. No way of discovering for what reason, and it's not as if I would want to discover, but according to the dictionary there aren't any words like that. Nor matters touching on money. Nor much blander stuff, either.

Money—that exists, and there exists this awkwardness about words touching on money, that somehow is what I sense. Money pays off my time, it signifies present tense, buys it separately, even if it doesn't bring it back, but it represents, makes it visible. Then too, in a strange way, it does bring back something that I didn't sell for money. My time, which I once considered I had to sell, I sell all over again; that's the mechanism, if I recollect. Fairly smooth functioning, if I don't recollect it, then I've truly written it off, and I'm not going to write off so easily something that I once had. When I write it down, I take it back. Family drama with a fixed cast, terrible hamming, a stream of empty chatter, the text unwritten, barely thought-through.

I don't feel like it, but play along all the same, then I quickly forget what. I lock myself in the bathroom, come out, I don't feel like it, nor like staying inside either, I'm peeved; as far as possible, for the sake of balance, there should always be one or two family members who are peeved at other members of the family, those are the best scenes. A few flawless scenes. Take the one where my dad, on my fourteenth birthday, opened the lid of the silver cigarette box with an appropriately theatrical flourish to signal that I might light up.

Feel free to light up, if you fancy one, but I didn't fancy one, didn't feel free to light up.

I fancied one but still didn't light up. That felt good, still, there were a few things I played out properly with him. One time I slammed the hall door in his face. We had been standing in the outside corridor, an argument ensued, I turned round, stepped into the hall and slammed the door in your face. At least 1x. Banged it to with full force.

Then I opened it, that too resolved itself, not that it was me who resolved it, nor he, but in any event the heartstrings are wrung—that dissolves it, the wringing.

In the early Sixties, one early afternoon or whatever in spring, I decided I was going to write. It took less than a minute, and of course not a word as to what I might write, nor indeed did I do any writing, and—OK—maybe I didn't even decide, still, I felt that I definitely had no hankering for anything else. Hankering—that both is and isn't the right word here. You decide from one minute to the next, then for years, ten whole years, nothing at all happens. A hundred years—of nothing. On the way home, I stop in front of one of the run-down blocks of flats on Izabella Street, dig out my ballpoint from my satchel, jot down a few words, and I look idiotic. That's where Kajtár's family lived. What's more, Géza's Ma promptly comes out through the front door and asks what I am doing. What do you think you're doing here? I must have looked idiotic, for sure, and in 1977 I jacked it in for good so as not to look idiotic, yet all the same it looks as if one thing and another happened anyway.

What happened is that I jacked in writing before I had even started, and I now want to understand why. Why in fact people jack what things in. 1995, a stately home not far outside Berlin, a very quiet small village, a slight whiff of dung,

castors on my chair so if I stand up it trundles away from under me as though the floor of the room were on a slight slope. The floor of the room does slope slightly. If I write anything down, right then I'm not remembering, and it's not that I'm not-remembering, more that I hit upon it—that form—in precisely the form it had.

As if I were taking it back. I grasp it and buy it back, hand back the money—pure business, pure joy. My melancholic mood had left me.

8

The news is on the radio. Every hour, the same male voice, infuriatingly in what's considered a velvety tone, the same maladroit, painstakingly mangled sentences. A few dozen stock phrases that are constantly wheeled out, hopelessly hackneyed words, the order barely varied, this is not a particularly critical part, that's the way they speak, this is what they reckon the news is. If I'm speaking to other people, it doesn't pertain to me but almost certainly pertains to the regime.

It pertains to me inasmuch as the regime also pertains to me. I would gladly detach it, but how can it be detached, and what would come off? Elsewhere, all of a sudden, I no longer speak like I do at home and I wonder why.

Or am I exaggerating? When one is a teenager, quite apart from living under Communism, wherever one is and whatever one does, a sense of justice, given that it has developed in one in the first place, surfaces ferociously, overgrows everything. The moment it emerges it overrides everything previous, one suddenly professes to know what the big picture is, sees the truth, does not err and has no mercy on anyone; what happens is that whilst not breaking away from those whom one hadn't even noticed till now, to be different from him, one does now notice.

One now realises that, accidentally, one is speaking in two different ways, even when one is saying exactly the same thing, and although not taken to task, one no longer muddles them up. That doesn't ring true here, the accidentally, it's not exact, but close enough, let it stay. Incidentally, innocently, involuntarily. One notices from whom one said to whom, one knows what to say, from having already said it. This lot here hijacks the words, that's the way, that is what the effort is expended on, they need just about all of them.

Admittedly, what other words could be. They kidnap all words and in doing so, whether I notice or not, kidnap me too. Meanwhile, irrespective of all that as it were, I get on fine, at other times lousily as usual, they fill out that mundane, empty, uniform structure, the emptiness itself, with me. I had enough time playing.

Work, having a job, that was a grind as I saw it, it was plain from my parents that it could only function like that through boredom. I saw them working, truly from morning until after midnight. I don't work. It's no use. After all, I've no in-

clination, no direction, I don't know what to do with myself, I'm paralysed by boredom, but even so I'm not going to work, I'd rather this paralysing monotony. I don't read through the homework for tomorrow's lessons, don't take so much as a peek, I don't tidy up after me, don't bring in the salt-cellar for lunch, someone else will bring it in, my younger sister will.

The servants will bring it in. Our heroic liberating forces. Whoever wants to, not me, I'd rather not salt the soup. I'd rather stay thirsty, but no way am I going out to the kitchen to fetch the water-jug. I eat slowly because it's vile; I eat because it's vile. Vile.

Vile, sand, vile, vile, disgusting, I chew on the same mouthful for hours. I carefully bite it in two. You bite it in two, it sticks together, it's putrid and takes for ever, so in the end you've been eating for ages, champing in vain, and finally it congeals. You chop your food in two in your mouth. What's to be done, what sort of techniques can I come up with for boredom. A piece of advice for ennui. My technique is I don't buckle down and don't finish—let's take that technique.

Then I do it after all, a last-minute rush, I know in advance that I'll finish it at the last moment, only not yet, because right now I'm bored, bored stiff. I'm bored rigid, a lead weight, pinned down, prostrate with boredom. I'll tidy away my stuff in my drawer some time, later, not now. The reason for that is interesting, by the way, and moreover it's on account of the system, because all this is just about all a system. Heroically getting out of bed in the morning still in the nick of time.

I stand on my bare soles, the parquet floor creaking, I make the parquet creak, right sole, left sole, right, back again, search for my underpants, shuffle out into the cold to brush my teeth, force the cocoa down in disgust. I step out from the school desk if my name is called, meanwhile watching how nicely the snow from my boots is melting around me, I've tastefully thawed onto the lino. I hear that I'm being spoken to, I answer, and why do I answer so nicely.

Like that for years. It goes on like that for years. Me. For what purpose. I give answers. I search for hours in the drizzling rain for the Lodestone cinema in order to see *La Guerre des Boutons,* but by then it has sold out.

The late-November fog is percolating down, there were no tickets; I walk along Delej Street, at the end of the world. The whole question of the self becomes a kind of false door in the background of his soul, with nothing behind. These all exist, I'll accept anything that manifests so self-evidently. He takes possession of what, in his language, he calls his self, but in the outward direction of what is so-called 'life', real life. After all, I manage in this language, I disappear in it, pop up, only rarely am I surprised. I don't understand everything but still give tolerable answers, which I deduce from the fact that when I reply people don't knee me in the belly or don't immediately start yelling. He doesn't pose the question again but leaves it to me; he says yes or no, or leaves.

He embraces me. I'm afraid and answer well, I'm usually spot on by accident, take the right stab, say the sorts of things that will do for them. My sense of

danger guides me out of boredom, steers me away from it. They fill up a continuously emptying charger, fill it with me. I pull the eiderdown over my head.

But then my leg sticks out. I read under the bedclothes, am immersed, that's how I fall asleep, and in the morning I wake up with the book pressing into my side. I read, that's another place, other frames of reference, they drive differently, amid happy confusions of another kind; it's not me who decides, I barely have the strength to extricate myself from there.

Like a deserted, haplessly isolated fort surrounded by Red Indians, towards the end of *The Last of the Mohicans*. Through a crack in a window, I watch how those outside, covering one another, bunching close together, jostle across the drawbridge towards the fort's gate, pop up and those behind them fall over them, one trampling the other, shoving one another over the parapet. They flail down comically, no need even to take aim.

I take aim and wait, when one of their heads pops up into the cross hairs I slowly squeeze the trigger with my index finger. They don't reach the top. A dull crump of cannon fire, a sound I recognise, in our cellar I heard the tank guns firing crisp rounds at one another in 1956, Hungarians fighting the Russians. The Russians are intruders. The Germans—only a tale. I'm a Hungarian.

I live in Hungary. My father died of cancer in nineteen seventy-seven. We hadn't left the country, so he died here at home. I wasn't there when he died but lolling on the sands of the Black Sea under a sunshade. He died of lung cancer. He had already suffered two heart attacks, and when they took him in, when he was brought to the hospital, they simply thought it must be the heart again, the heart of man, but why did they think it was simply that.

Didn't they examine him? Or did they examine him, and then that, in the end, would make it all the more the Soviets than the poxy resort from which I was barely able to get away on account of a fat-arsed security officer. Than the hand-span-and-a-half of red-tinted map surface in my middle-school atlas. The person responsible examines my father, and what does he actually do? Whereas I stand in line for my passport. Do you hear these things?

These irrelevant, meaningless remarks and omissions that relate to nothing? I joined the queue for a passport, I remember that, I stand at the end of a line on the top floor of a fuggy official building, posters for the classic film theatre visible from the window. In front of me two girls with black-dyed hair are chatting, paying attention solely to one another, not so much as a glance at me.

One of them takes a peek at what I am reading, she cocks her head to one side, her mouth open, diary of a s, she moves her lips a bit as she strives to make out the book's title, diary of a seducer, as if I were not even there, only my book, a book dangling in mid-air just like that. Yet I was there, it's the least of it to say that I would have liked to be there. For the queue to shorten more rapidly.

The queue did dwindle later, the two girls disappeared, I exchanged my money. The posters had been changed, the cinema had closed. I got away. My father

had died. Father paces up and down in the middle room, the parquet floor creaking under him, he's not well. Aren't you well? Course I'm well, why do you ask, I can hear his voice now. He wasn't well, I might have known. Shouldn't have gone away.

I knew he wasn't, didn't I? Or else I didn't listen, and it's unimportant to make nothing up? A few weeks before that, Szalkay's younger brother had died. I'd been demobbed from the army and travelled down to their place; that was the first time I'd seen him. We arrived at dawn and rang the doorbell for quarter of an hour before he was finally willing to open the door. Eyes closed. I instantly started to be bleeding up-to-here with him.

He was standing in the door, eyes closed, his hair all over the place, holding his pyjama bottoms up with his forearm, an early morning at the end of June, what the fuck's up, why can't you let a chap sleep. He died in the spring of 1977, an articulated lorry sheered off the top of his car on Highway 3. He hadn't been admitted to university, and he'd been working at a petrol station so as at least to earn a packet by the time the next entrance exams came round. He earned a packet too, and bought a car.

He lived for a few more hours, even came round and spoke to the people in the hospital, the doctor in charge said what about, but I've forgotten. His guitar had been smashed. He asked the nurse what had happened to his guitar. It bucketed down throughout the burial service, the rain hammering on the umbrella silks, so they galloped through the ceremony, a few Gypsies wildly tossing the earth into the grave with their spades.

The Gypsies had round black hats clapped onto the crown of the head—not necessarily due to the rain, more by regulation.

We turned into the local pub, rain was streaming down the windows. The spaciousness, the motley colours and bareness of autumn. When Father died I was holidaying by the sea, at a Soviet resort, and was unable to get home because they wouldn't transfer the flight booking. I was badly burned. The official wouldn't change my ticket.

It's up to her to transfer the booking, and you either will now or you won't, I remember the way she shook her head, the perm tipping over to one side. Then springing back, as if she were shaking a plastic whorl, tipping away then tipping back, it would be enough for her to shake it just the once. She likes shaking that nyet, that's for sure. Or maybe that was the year before after all? No, it couldn't have been, because that was when I was in Rome with C. And right before we left Father came out with the advice that I should marry her.

I should marry, make her my wife—all this on the very evening before departure, at supper, whilst we were in the middle of the cheese cutlets. I'll marry her when the time comes, keep your hair on. I'll either get hitched or I won't, there aren't going to be any regrets. C. always kept her Ma's black-lace mantilla in her handbag, and if we went into a church she would drape it round her shoulders.

It suited her down to the ground, but then again she wouldn't have been allowed to enter anywhere without it. She would toss all her loose change into collecting boxes.

I told her not to do it, she shouldn't throw away so much, but she just carried on anyway, when she thought I wasn't looking, she would toss it in; though admittedly it wasn't really all that much. On the evening before departure Father comes out with me needing to get hitched. Fine, I replied straight off, it'll be done, cool it, I'll get married some day for sure. Obviously, I did say something.

Well, you got an answer, didn't you? Just hang on till then. The New Year's Eve of 1977 I slept beside a skinny, blond, baby-faced Russian whore in Moscow.

A Georgian acquaintance had ordered her to our place by phone. At the time we had been travelling all over for months out of the dough we got for a few pairs of jeans, the trashiest printed T-shirts, a dozen disposable razors, and some coloured nylon bags. The Georgian went out to make the call then came back and nodded that it was sorted. The cold out on the street was barely tolerable, the apartment too was cold, quite impossible to heat, so we kept the gas stove going in the kitchen. The girl's slip had a hole in it.

A fingernail-sized hole in the front of her slip, around the middle, over her belly. She wriggled out of her faded cardie, her skin pallid, dry, smelling of baby soap, wrapping her arms over breasts, clutching them to her so as to cover the thing up, that little hole. The morning after I'll give her my pullover.

My woollen pullover, all sorts of stuff that I have, slivers of soap, a fistful of rubels, all the forints I have on me. She kneels down and undoes my flies, doesn't close her eyes. Although she is to belong to me, it mustn't be just in the unaesthetic sense that weighs down on me like a burden. She steals a look at me, smiles, and starts speaking Russian, asking questions then immediately answering herself. Whether it's good for her or not, I don't know. Good.

No, it's not. She's trying to cover her breasts so I'm forced to twist her wrists back, which she allows me to do. With an earnest face.

Her face is earnest, staying earnest even when she smiles. I grasp her by the arm, her wrist is so thin, translucent fingers, nails bitten down to the quick, her skin rough, purpling from the cold. Short-cropped hair, wispy strands; as I stroke it, she closes her eyes, her eyelashes fluttering, and she stops speaking. She defends herself with a laugh, first she has to put up a defence even if she wants to stay that way for ever. I'll tell her everything, everything.

I stagger out into the kitchen, turn the tap on. The snow has frozen onto the glass, the air seeping in through the cracks twitches the curtains, the windowpanes are quivering in the draught. I awake to find her tucking me up, she slips under the quilted coverlet, pressing her face and cold nose to my belly. I wake up and hear the gas hissing.

The flame wasn't burning on the stove, the gas was gushing out. No smell of gas, no smell of anything, the girl was sitting on the bed, blanket pulled up to

her neck, chin resting on her knees, and she was talking to herself. She is speaking, but I don't understand, don't even hear what. What's she saying? What are you saying? She embraces me and bores her head into my lap. Does she do it for the money? She was no longer there when I woke up in the morning.

Do you do it only for the money? Yes, for the money.

Do we die?

9

We used to trek out into the thickets along the settlement's outer perimeter road to have a smoke. We'd pool our dough and buy a pack of Swallows in the people's store. They had just started making the brand around then, and Leveczki would immediately detach the filter from the ciggie, twisting it off and flicking it away, the way he had seen from his father. On overcast, not unduly hot days we'd take ourselves off on exploratory trips to the refuse tip at Nagy Petina, out behind the Kovács farm. The stench was less early in the morning, still bearable, with the morning mist lifting and the breeze wafting the smell off towards Pomáz, carrying it among the houses there. When there was a breeze.

If there wasn't, then it stayed put, squatting in the maize fields besides the piles of refuse.

Barley, sunflowers—whatever they were cultivating at that time of year. Dumper trucks were used to cart in building rubble, slag from the Budakalász brick factory, battle-worn rubber tyres, the district's household refuse, all imaginable junk to the pits. In the noonday heat the air would start to congeal, sometimes a tyre would spontaneously ignite, burst into flames, burning with acrid, black fumes until it was extinguished or snuffed out of its own accord. The newer heaps always reek the worst, the older ones gradually dried out, dust settled on them, soil drifted onto them, and after a few weeks nettles, burdock, thistles, weeds of all sorts, popped up. Rubbish tip, a real treasure-trove, with treasures.

With things seen as treasures. We would carefully pick out and collect those treasures, then stow them in the bushes in the ditch along Zrinyi Street. The lesser part of the treasure, as it soon transpired that the booty wasn't worth much. A lot to start with, but as time went by ever less, which is to say—too bad—nothing, it had been a daft idea to retrieve it, ought really to lug it back.

Still, it's hard to tumble to the realisation that it's worth nothing at all, so it has some value nevertheless, and the slower the realisation the more it's worth, relatively speaking, the value rests on the realisation, indeed it may be that the realisation itself is the value. The collections of others were anyway far more seductive, enviably so, and I would initially be envious too, until it transpired that they were totally valueless. The envy would pass, the value would pass, that's how it works, only I can't be sure about the order. What's the point of my keeping a rubber ring, or these rusty springs. In any case, this collecting had a character that in a way could be called militant, disciplined at any rate.

Not wartime, more post-war, a kind of salvaging strategy. Though by then we no longer played at soldiers, there was no commander, no discipline, no dangerous situations, but even without rules it carried on in orderly fashion, an order evolved. Nothing explicit, yet still something to adhere to, and even if there were no commands it was good to take one's cue from the others, from some sort of imaginary commander.

As for the treasures, when it panned out that they were useless, we slung them away, chucked them into rubbish skips, scraped soil over them at the edges of the ploughed fields. The fields belonged to Pomáz though, not to our settlement, let them worry about it. On one of our smoking expeditions Stinker came up all in a lather, he'd seen some strange dickhead snooping around the settlement, peeping in everywhere, going into the shop and even into the church.

No shit, he'd been keeping an eye on him since yesterday as he strolled off towards the station, swinging a briefcase, only he'd said nothing then. He wasn't buying anything, wasn't praying. He reckons. Thieving rather. We went after Stinker, off to the ground and started to play footie. Görögcs lobbed the ball into the church grounds then nipped over to fetch it but first clambered up onto the sill of the church window and peeked in before instantly jumping down.

He's looking to filch something.

A short while later out came a grey-haired stranger and, as if he hadn't even noticed us, set off towards the suburban train stop. Bloody hell, he's going to rob the place. You watch, he's going to rob the collection box.

He strolled slowly down the middle of the main road, stopped, took a look around at the cherry trees. We, for our part, set off after him. We walked nice and carefully after the thief, a long way behind, though still so as he would spot us.

In the meantime, whilst hoping he would spot us and take fright, we also hoped he wouldn't spot us. And it wouldn't be us who had to take fright. What was better. Anything was better, and I for one hoped he wouldn't see me in particular.

He was clutching his briefcase under his arm. I was wheeling my bicycle, a real secret cop, creeping conscientiously after the thief. You know what that feels like. He stepped over the rails, sat down on a bench and waited for the train to Pest, boarded it and took a window seat, his back to the direction of travel, not looking out. Well, he did look out, but not this way. Not towards us, which is why he's a thief.

The thief in him is that he doesn't turn this way, and not because he doesn't dare, but out of craftiness. After that I cycled home. He's frightened of us, scared. In the meantime it had grown quite dark, the frogs were croaking as they should.

The next day I returned from the Pünkösdfürdő Pools early in the afternoon, sooner than usual, because I had stepped on a wasp and the sole of my foot had swelled up. More likely a small bee. We'd been playing footie barefoot at the

back, on the turf alongside the ping-pong tables, so the soles of my feet were green. As if it was not part of me, that's how much my foot swelled, the plimsoll wouldn't fit. I still managed to force it on somehow, but on the way back I had to take it off.

I took it off on the train. I poked around at my sole, reddened, dirty green, no longer hurting it had become so numb, tingling more than hurting. When I got off they were just easing a headless human body into some sort of box. There is the story of a peasant who had come barefoot to town and made so much money that he was able to buy himself a pair of stockings and shoes and still have enough left over to get himself drunk. On his way home in his drunken state he lay down in the middle of the lane and fell asleep. A carriage came along, and the coachman shouted to him to move aside or he would drive over his legs. The drunk peasant woke up, looked down at his legs, and, not recognising them because of the stockings and shoes, said, "Go ahead, they aren't my legs.'

Once Lolly found a bag of five-fillér coins in the rubbish. A plastic bag full of five-fillér pieces, all carefully drilled through the centre, perforated like the two-fillér coins. We didn't even take a proper look at them but put the swag next to the cigarettes and the box of matches, hidden among the roots of the bush. A real treasure, we'd see later what we were going to do with it. The next day it wasn't there.

The bag of perforated five-fillér coins had vanished. Not the cigarettes. That was more or less the end, that's how the ciggie-gang packed up. The matter wasn't discussed, there was no pow-wow about it, the get-togethers just folded of their own accord. We didn't talk it over, yet still everyone knew this was the last match, the end of the summer. Could Lolly have taken it? He'd found the bag, so it was his, wasn't it?

Most of them I haven't seen since. Not Lolly, Christie just once or twice; he had shrunk a whole lot, withered up, shrivelled to the bone. Then Tibi Sárosi became a car mechanic; I took my car in to him to have it serviced. Not long ago I ran into one of them; he greeted me from the terrace of a coffee bar, called my name out, and I hadn't a clue who he was. Then it suddenly came to me. Suddenly, as I was stopping, it flashed into my mind that it was Joey.

That's it: Joey. The name of that kid Joey, from the Freddie-Joey-Laci threesome.

I went down to the ditch one more time to have a puff, the last pack was still there, so I fished a fag out, smoked it and waited just in case someone showed. The next time I didn't find the cigarettes there. The ditch itself had been filled in. I poked around with my fingers in the clay just in case a five-fillér piece had been left by some fluke. The very end of August, it was infernally hot at noon then suddenly cooled down towards dusk, so I didn't go out to the pitch.

The next day we moved back to Pest, school was starting. The German hundred-mark note portrays the pianist Clara Schumann. Robert Schumann, if

the story is true, wrecked his touch with misguided exercises, couldn't play any longer.

He supposedly slit the webs between his fingers in order to broaden his hand-span, he came up with that. Guts-Gold chicken pieces, 0.854 kg—5.54 DM. Six eggs—1.79, Spanish red peppers, quite nice-looking—1.99, two cans of Pils Exquisit—1.38, loaf of Poni bread—2.69, Kalinka kefir—1.29, a bunch of spring onions—0.67, Fürstenbrunn mineral water—1.99, tomatoes—0.93.

Carbonzola cheese, 0.183 kg—4.01, Viennetta ice-cream—3.29, vanilla sugar —0.39, Raguletto sauce for pasta asciutta—3.29, grapes—2.24, 0.331 kg Parmesan cheese—13.21, soapy stuff or shampoo, squeezable, labelled Life Time—1.99, anti-dandruff.

If your hair gets dandruffy. Comb it one way, scurf; the other way, no scurf. A lemon—0.69, Landfrische Fettarme milk—1.09, Alsheimer Rheinblick, white wine—2.99. Hohes C—1.89, a big bottle of Macedonian Kadarka—2.49, 0.172 kg beef, sirloin—3.94, six bottles Schulteiss beer—3.99, spinach pizza—2.99, Pizza Fiesta—2.99, Nutella—2.79, two cucumbers—0.79, cream—0.89, two kiwi fruits —0.58, bottle of olives—1.99, five bread rolls—0.89, chocolate Lebküchen, Ulmi brand—1.79, Knorr grated cheese—1.69, sultanas—0.69, paper serviettes—1.99, barely speckled bananas—1.90, Advent candles—0.99, and all these wares from a Berlin branch of Kaiser's in December ninety-five, a grand total of 95.30 German marks. That's dough for you. I'll get back some small change.

When the sun comes out, every now and then, the curtains fly apart, the sunshine fundamentally rearranges the stately home's grounds. At times like this nothing stays that way, misty and sunny at once; the mist rearranges things, the sun too, covering up and then revealing what it had earlier covered up. A pack of Swallows, as I recall, cost four forints back in the summer of 1962. Once, all at once, sometime. Weightier metal coins, if I toss them up, land on their edge, roll a long time, then, tipping on one side, spin round to describe tiny, ever-quicker circles. I hope there will always be something I forget to mention. ❧

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

PERSONAL

Gábor Németh

Even If They Do Look Inside

I have a name, and yet I don't.

I open my ID booklet, everything's in order, just that secret name of mine, that's not in it.

I swear to God, I do have one. They put it in a big book, there in Saint Stephen's Basilica. It was a Dutchman who gave it to me, actually. A Dutchman who held me as the baptismal water came. A half-Hungarian Dutchman. The son of my grandma's brother. Uncle Johan. And this became my invisible name, too. No Uncle, of course. Just Johan. Like the name of a tree. The yarran, for example. In Dutch they write Johan with just one 'n', and that's elegant.

Back then in '56, Uncle Johan was obviously not yet an Uncle, he can't have been more than twenty-five. Was he there in the Basilica at all? The christening was some time in December; the fraternal tanks had long set themselves up. Or was the border still open, here and there?

Uncle Johan was a racing driver.

My godfather's a racing driver, you see?

He sat in his Porsche, his open-top Porsche, for Uncle Johan pays no heed to the great Russian winter, and with a long scarf around his neck he tears across Europe to find me under the holy baptismal water in time, to save my soul from Kádár. The Yankee machine-gun clattered away on the back seat. Uncle Johan was never frightened of death.

Or is that not quite how it happened?

I look at the pictures, the old family photos, or rather I'd look at them but they're packed away somewhere. (It's a bit strange that the most of my very Catholic Dutch cousins look like Sephardic Jews, especially my godfather. Actually, to this day, I'm still not able to ask about this.) Aunt Toncsi ended up

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Gábor Németh's
latest work, Zsidó vagy? *(Are You Jewish?), a novel, from which this text has been excerpted, appeared in 2004, and was reviewed in the previous issue of* HQ.

there, she was part of the Dutch programme to fatten up the children, sometime in the twenties. Invited by the Queen, or something. She came home, then went back again. She fell in love with a Dutchman, a very Dutch and very Catholic Dutchman, they made themselves twelve children, after every three boys they had a girl, right up until nineteen fifty-five. The ones that took after their mother had what they called uncontrollable black curls. Most of the boys were damnedly, horribly handsome, with olive-brown skin. They might even make you think of the tough Jews in *Once Upon a Time in America.* So that's how I always imagined the Dutch. Six foot tall, smiling Brooklyn gangsters.

There's a type of cigarette you can't get nowadays. Stuyvesant. Peter Stuyvesant, the man who founded New York. At one time that's what I smoked, when anything, esoterically proving that I was on the point of being Dutch. A little bit Dutch at heart. A Dutch learner smoker.

Actually, just to let you know, New York was originally called New Amsterdam.

A habit it was a shame to give up.

The world as a Dutch colony. A Dutch planet. Basic Dutch—the language everyone would try to speak in. Ear, nose and throat specialists would have their work cut out. Einstein is leaving the room, so he turns to the other Nobel laureates in Dutch: Gentlemen, you can switch to Hungarian now.

Sometimes the Dutch come home, back to Hungary.

The situation is complicated by the fact that my godmother is Dutch, or rather entirely Hungarian, as she is the daughter of my grandma's other sister, who stayed behind in Hungary. So my godmother was born Hungarian, but when she went to visit Aunt Toncsi in the beginning of the sixties, a Dutchman got into her compartment in Vienna, and they started to talk. She and Robi. And I always like to imagine that by the time they reached Aachen, Robi had made a wife out of Márta in the buffet car.

So the Dutch come sometimes, like Aunt Toncsi's husband, come in whopping great Western cars, we go out to dinner at a hundred miles an hour, even though Uncle Johan (he is Johan, too, just to make things harder) is blind in one eye, because he was wounded in the war, or had an accident, I can't remember. But he's a mechanic. So obviously because he's a mechanic he is allowed to drive, he knows more about cars than non-mechanics who can see properly, the two things cancel each other out, I told myself, trembling, as we were going at a hundred and fifty. It is nineteen sixty-two. Quite simply, the Hungarian police had nothing that could catch up with him. I am a bit scared of Uncle Johan anyway, strict and playful at the same time, and if we are eating I can't take my eyes off his glass eye.

On the subject of eating, the Dutch like Hungarian food, at home they are stingy, of course, it drives my grandma round the twist at home when they count the number of meat slices, if there are seven people for dinner, so my grandma tells me, then seven pieces of meat are cooked, the mind boggles. While down here, Hungarian chicken legs are flying all over the place. It doesn't matter. Not

that I mind, just it's strange that arithmetic doesn't call the shots in the same way down here.

And look how thin they slice bread, she points out.

Almost thin enough to see through.

And there are no curtains in front of the windows. You walk down the street, you can peep in anywhere, obviously no one actually peeps in anywhere, but away they live their lives so that you can peep in at any time and not see anything shocking.

Transparent.

Once the Dutch brought glass marbles, a bag of them.

A little bag, a bit like what you get garlic in nowadays. Tight little nylon rhombuses. There are thirty marbles, I have never seen marbles as nice as these in my life, a bit like glass eyes, maybe, but they're really nice. I roll them on the floor. The marble rolls, the Sun plays with it, not just me. It spins, some blue light glows from inside. Must be a nice place, Holland.

And I can't tell you how much I love Dutch cocoa. I come home from the park, after football, there's the pan on the stove, down it in one. I think my grandma left it there on purpose.

She made it.

Real Dutch cocoa.

Droste.

On the tin box is a Dutch woman, with a funny whatsit on her head, like she were a nun. The woman is shown as Dutch. Wooden clogs, of course, and folk dress, shame you can't wear a windmill. There's a tray in the nun's hands with a tin of the same cocoa on it, then there in miniature is the Dutch woman on the tin painted on the tin, holding herself in her hands, *et cetera.* If the tunnel were fine enough, you could see into infinity.

You can still have a look, of course, for an eternity.

As if you were standing at the sea.

I read that in 1939 the Dutch made a decision, nice and resentfully, that if you guys are stupid enough to invade us, then we'll become an island, flood eastern Holland with water, it'll work, just think, it's all below sea level.

I wonder what anyone in eastern Holland thought about that idea.

We would get to the edge of the continent, and there would be Sneezy and Grumpy waiting for us, we'd punch our tickets, then off to Amsterdam, some nice little café.

I don't know if I mentioned it, but the Dutch live on a boat, that boat doesn't go anywhere, but it's a good mooring, with grass all over half of it, I mean that's not bad.

But being Dutch is pretty good anyway.

If you're Dutch, and for some reason you have to live in a house, if your boat has a hole in it or something, then there is a pulley-rope hanging from the wall, you don't have to carry the piano up on your back.

Actually it could have been good for me, too, I could have been Dutch, if my grandma had stayed there rather than her sister. If I see or hear the word Dutch, the chance of another life appears before me, simpler, more gallant, more cheeky, more free, to name four things for a start.

For example, in this other life I would have a boat, with two masts and black tulips planted on it. From time to time I would gobble some very expensive raw fish at the market, and down it with a little gin. In a heroic struggle, I would thieve land from the sea.

Now let us look at how I formed my first conception of the Hollander. Let's face it, it's no simple story, and I'll show you why.

I'm running a temperature, at times like this my mother tells me a story, maybe from my favourite book of fairy-tales, maybe my favourite story, the temperature and the book together, that really gets to me, the *Stone Heart* really gets to me, and then it gets to the part where "Now there is so much money in the country, the people have lost their honour and turned bad. On Sundays, young men dance and whoop, and curse so strongly it is painful to listen to; but things were still different back then, and even if he looks in through the window, I will say the same thing I have said so many times: Michael the Hollander is the cause of this decline."

Even if he looks in through the window.

How about that?

The icy sweat on my back.

The Hollander looks in, his boots were made from the skin of a pair of oxen, he looks in, in he comes, tears your heart out, puts it in a jar on a shelf of the larder and in its place in your ribcage, he lays a cold stone.

The last thing you needed before lunch, as László Garaczi would say.

I imagined that stone a lot of times. Rugged, about the size of a properly-grown avocado, and cold, but above all heavy, once it's inside, it presses on your stomach, so it hurts like hell, and so after a while you start screaming.

It doesn't even hurt, according to the Hollander.

It doesn't hurt but: "...is quite pleasantly cool. Why should a heart have to be warm? In winter the heart's warmth doesn't help, a good cherry brandy is more use than a warm heart, and in summer, when everything is suffocating and hot, you won't believe how this kind of heart will cool things down. And as I say, neither worry, nor alarm, nor inane compassion, nor any other affliction can make this kind of heart beat."

That inane compassion shouldn't make it beat.

The thing is, the max is that if you throw away the inane compassion, the pain, then you throw away pleasure, too, and the only thing that remains up there is a big, unblemished surface, and under that there really is nothing, just curiosity, easily drugged with cold and easy methods, the curiosity as to what comes next, what life can throw up in your path.

Occasionally we would go out to dinner with them, to the nice places, Margaret Island, the Grand Hotel, that kind of thing. A lot of us around a long

table, the adults talk with each other, it's totally dull, and out of boredom Paula and I start to play tag. The pebbles crunch as we spin around. Paula's pretty good at it, she's a year older, it's true, it's only later she'll get fat, later still she'll be cheerful and cheeky fat, it is only when she's fat she'll start being cheeky. Watch it, there'll be trouble, that's all she can say in Hungarian. All she can say in her own mother tongue. Now she's still slim and running after me. I run, I get away, while running I bend over to squeeze underneath some metal bar painted green. I pulled myself up at exactly the wrong moment. I straightened myself up and immediately the world began to change. What's this heat in my ears? Why is everything moving so slowly? Someone in a distance is saying, Jesus, he's cracked his head. I cracked my head because of the Dutch. Watch it, there'll be trouble. The Dutch have cracked my head. Unfortunately I can't take a look at the hole from above, but if it's cracked, obviously you can look inside. Shame about that, because it must be pretty interesting. My mum takes me to hospital by taxi.

The way not to cry is to empty your heart.

That is how the Dutch recipe would go.

You put a cold stone inside there.

Or you can do what really happens.

That it is not a stone they put in you, but money. This is what they shove down your throat nowadays. As far as I am concerned, it is still better to be Dutch, or at least it was better until now: they had the world's most entertaining currency, beautiful yellows, mature oranges, light blues, relaxed, asymmetric design. About a thousand times nicer than the Euro.

My grandma kept her sewing kit in a Dutch chocolate tin, if I scrape all the buttons out of it, and all the thread, the tips of my fingers will smell of chocolate. *Chocola.* That's the way they write chocolate in Dutch, sounds a little disgusting, roughly like a turkey taking a crap, but who cares. Dutch chocolate is just the best in the world. Otherwise they wouldn't bring it every time. Sometimes they bring a ball, too, my godfather brings it in his Porsche, and on the first day it's burst by the tram on Pozsonyi Street. A beautiful, red, rock-hard plastic ball: I am king of Saint Stephen's Park. For about seven minutes. Or is it not even red, am I making everything up? Round about the second time we're on the attack, someone kicks a long pass forwards, a bit like one of Zoli Varga's, but just too long and out of the Park, right underneath the number fifteen tram.

Nothing is left of it.

I'm not crying.

I'm sitting on my mother's lap, she's taking me to hospital. She holds me tightly, doesn't fuss about the blood, it's nice as she holds me, the taxi is light green, a brand new Moskvitch, it's nice to look out of, the houses fade away nicely behind us. Let's say it's still something I can credit the Dutch for. ❧

Translated by David Robert Evans

A Slap in the Face of Europe

Paul Lendvai on the EU elections—An Interview with Eszter Rádai

Today's European Union is going to be more difficult to govern than yesterday's, claims the Hungarian-born political commentator Paul Lendvai, editor-in-chief of the Vienna-based review Europäische Rundschau *and author of* The Hungarians: A Thousand Years of Victory in Defeat. *Lendvai, a well-known expert in East Central European politics, believes that the surprisingly low turnout in the European elections has, in a way, discredited the European Union and the idea of Europe. This is, Lendvai suggests, likely to increase political tensions within the EU. From now on it will be more difficult to reach consensus in issues of economic policy. There is reason to fear that tough decisions which leaders have been putting off until now will continue being put off indefinitely or they will end up being "watered down."*

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Eszter Rádai: *How do you view these election results? Typical negative mid-term results for governing parties or something else? A response to how the electorate feels their own country is weighted in the European Parlament and in EU decision-making, to the perceived benefits from membership? A response to the Union itself and its decisions—including the decision to allow the countries of Eastern Europe to join?*

Paul Lendvai: The election was basically negative. Voters were not responding to the achievements, shortcomings, the plans of the European Parliament, the European Council or Commission, or the European Union. In almost every country, including Hungary, voters took the opportunity to deliver a slap in the face to their own government and governing party—not to conservatives or socialists as such, but to whichever party happened to be in government.

Eszter Rádai

is on the staff of the Budapest weekly Élet és Irodalom. *She has published several volumes of interviews.*

Is this especially new in elections for the European Parliament?

Not new, but never so pronounced before in Western Europe, never expressed so strongly and never has the turnout been this low. And even more striking, and this shocked Western Europe countries as well, was the low voter turnout in the new member countries: it had always seemed as though there was nothing that these countries wanted more than to join the Union, to "return to Europe".

So why were voters indifferent and why didn't the parties campaigning address common European issues?

A great expert in matters European named Friedrich Nietzsche said that finding advocates of the truth is hardest not when the truth is dangerous, but when it is boring.

The concept of a unified Europe and the EU are boring?

Well, they have become boring to some extent, for different reasons in the West and the East. In the West, because they have been living in the Union for so long, and in the East because they only know the clichés about Europe. But maybe there is a positive side too: if the election had taken place at a later stage, the new member countries would have been even more disenchanted. Right now they still expect to gain a number of direct benefits through the Union. And, obviously, there are going to be plenty of benefits, not in the short run but in the intermediate and long term.

Everyone in Hungary complains that they don't know what EU membership will mean for them, that's why they feel frustrated. Yet whenever any TV or radio programme tries to provide in-depth information, its audience ratings plummet.

I would blame politics. Even though the Hungarian political system has proved to be much more stable than in other post-communist countries, there has still been many problems in recent years. Political rhetoric has become more European, but on a deeper level the discourse is considerably more provincial than it used to be. Hungarian domestic politics and parties have a kind of navel-gazing preoccupation, and that sometimes gets exported to Europe. By the way, viewed from Europe, Hungary's image is a good deal more positive than from within the country.

Hungary showed a more positive face in the European elections than most of its neighbours. Its thirty-eight per cent turnout was better than the EU average, and extremist, anti-EU parties failed to garner significant support.

Sure, but the context has to be taken into account. Compared with Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Poland, Romania or Bulgaria, the problems confronting Hungary seem less dramatic. In other respects, however, the situation is just as troubling. Transparency International has now downgraded Hungary from thirty-third to fortieth place in its ranking of countries on their lack of corruption.

Finland occupied the first place, its economic performance and growth was strongest according to the World Economic Forum in Geneva. This shows the close connection between the absence of or low level of corruption and the high performance of an economy. The other major problem Hungary now faces is the diminishing dynamism of foreign investment. Now these problems do not manifest themselves in a dramatic manner, but they are quite serious. There is another side of the coin, however: the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung,* a very reliable and well-informed newspaper, reported that Hungarian economic indicators have improved and that the International Monetary Fund has a more positive assessment of the state of the Hungarian economy than the Hungarian National Bank, which paints a downright pessimistic picture. Now, as for the positive tendencies in the European elections, they testify to the maturity of Hungarian politics and the patience of Hungarians: compared to the Polish, Czech, Estonian, Latvian or Slovakian situation, this is clearly something we should welcome. Not in terms of what Hungary could have achieved, but what it is capable of.

To return to the European elections. What was at stake for Hungarian voters? Are Hungarian interests within the EU a function of the party affiliations of the twenty-four Hungarian MEPs?

Although the European Parliament's role is becoming more important, its potentials are limited, since the composition of the Parliament calls for constant compromise. Even though the conservatives had the plurality in the last elections, through an alliance with the liberals the socialists managed to have their way and thus Romano Prodi became President of the European Commission. Things will continue to be done this way in the future.

An institution whose authority is limited and which is still struggling to define its own identity...

Yes, that is the case in a certain sense, for decisions are made—following approval by the European Parliament—by the European Council, whose members are deputed by the national governments, the prime ministers of the twenty-five countries. Still, I would say that the stakes were high and a great deal was lost. This strikingly low turnout has in a certain sense discredited the idea of Europe, the spirit of Europe, the EU, and the very process of Europeanization. It was a slap in the face not just for the national governments but for Europe as well. The EU has the third largest population in the world and accounts for twenty-five per cent of global GP. But after this round of elections, how can we expect the US, China and India to view the decisions reached by European heads of government as the decisions of a global player? Out of indifference or antipathy, the majority of its citizens chose to ignore the European Union, whose leaders purport to represent the people and countries of Europe. This presents an enormous problem, because it gives a huge boost to populists and demagogues. It will give rise

to tremendous difficulties in Hungary, and even more so in Poland, where one out of four or five earn their livelihood in agriculture. For a while yet their situation will keep getting worse and there are irresponsible political forces that will seek to exploit the frustration felt by these people. Just look at Germany: the Schröder government is going to be ousted—it lost the European Parliament elections—because the economic performance of the old East Germany is still less than seventy per cent of the EU average and this is despite the 1300 billion euros in subsidies lashed out over twelve years. These East German regions (Länder) are now expected to lose a great deal, which makes voters in those states very angry. If you take all this into account, you may get an idea of what we should expect in the new member countries, where the heroes of the transition era are gone, and people are now facing everyday reality. Everyday reality is devoid of revolutionary pathos; it's all about calculation, and whoever doesn't calculate carefully, loses the game. But the outcome of the election is also likely to make conflicts within the EU sharper: it will be harder to reach agreement on questions of economic policy and the fear is that the tough measures leaders have been putting off until now will continue to be put off or end up being passed in a "watered-down" form. It is now going to be much more difficult to find the appropriate form for the European constitution. When work on the constitution started under Giscard d'Estaing, *The Economist* suggested in a leader that the draft be discarded right away. At that time, I thought that this approach was too cynical, now I think that there was a fair amount of truth to it. It is extremely important that political consensus is reached, that the leaders know what they want, how far they can go, what kinds of concessions and exceptions they can make, and how much difficulty voters can put up with. Democracy is an experiment fraught with risk, but I still have to agree with Churchill's comment that it's a terrible system but nothing better has been found so far. This is true for every country in the EU: a fascinating experiment is underway, which, as this election has shown, continues to surprise us and which is not without its dangers.

Is there any chance that this slap in the face might prompt the government here to end procrastination and take up some long-overdue reforms? The Hungarian Socialist Party lost one and a half million of its votes; arguably, it could not have lost more even if it had relentlessly imposed the required measures.

Look, it's easy for me to talk. I am neither the circus animal-tamer nor the animal jumping through hoops—I'm just a spectator. But since you ask, let me remind you that 2006 is still pretty far off. Harold Wilson, the British Prime Minister, once said that a week is a long time in politics. So, two years after the Medgyessy government raised the salaries of public servants by fifty per cent, no one remembers, even though the extra money has been pocketed. But it's no use complaining of the ingratitude of people because they cannot be sacked, it would be wiser to admit that the raise cost the country too much. One might

ask, what about the Opposition, which has astutely and ruthlessly taken advantage of the situation? Of course it has. By the way, Hungary has a strange kind of bipolar system: the governing coalition consists of the small liberal party (SZDSZ, Alliance of Free Democrats) and a civic party (MSZP, the Hungarian Socialist Party) within which a wide range of left-wing, liberal, middle-class, pro-reform, and hard-line tendencies and individuals co-exist and contend with one another, without in any way concealing their conflicts (quite the opposite, in fact). In contrast to the Socialists, the main opposition party is a highly disciplined organization. Victor Orbán, its leader is endowed with an authority that cannot be questioned. There are no debates within the party, its public relations are handled very efficiently. It is much easier to get by for a party such as this, especially when it is in opposition, than for the continually bickering governing coalition. Especially on crucial issues, no party can afford to speak with multiple voices. At some point arguments must be set aside. In Britain, for instance, Gordon Brown would never take up publicly a position against his Prime Minister Tony Blair. He might decide to do so at some future point, but only when it is clear that Blair must go. In the meantime, however, the leadership of the party remains loyal to Blair even amidst the greatest difficulties. We find the same situation in Germany, with Schröder and the SPD. So the Socialist Party in Hungary must first present a clear profile, and then the government coalition must do the same in order to get started with reforms, and not just on a rhetorical level. Clearly, no government can afford a full implementation of the ruthless austerity package proposed by Lajos Bokros, the ex-minister of finance; all the same, the government will have to espouse at least some of these urgently needed measures. Even more importantly, political leaders on both sides must be "clean" and seen to be so. For sooner or later everything comes to light. If someone's hands are not clean, if someone is doing exactly the same things as those whom he criticizes (and less smartly to boot) then he will lose not just his credibility but also the backing of his own supporters. The expectations are not good for a governing party that keeps putting off unpopular measures, while its members abuse their position in order to advance their own private interests and, while they are at it, engage in power struggles and back-stabbing. I also want to draw attention to another mistake vitiating both sides: just as Viktor Orbán was ill-advised to try to incorporate the MDF (Hungarian Democratic Forum) into FIDESZ (Alliance of Young Democrats–Hungarian Civic Party), it has been a frequent mistake on the part of the MSZP to ignore SZDSZ, without which it wouldn't have a parliamentary majority. Perhaps if the Socialist Prime Minister Gyula Horn had been more willing to heed his coalition partner between 1994 and 1998, the first socialist-liberal coalition might not have lost the 1998 elections.

The tiny opposition party, the Hungarian Democratic Forum, managed to pick up one seat that might have gone to FIDESZ, whose leaders are talking about a land-

slide victory, with over four hundred thousand votes more than the Socialist Party's. To what extent do you think Viktor Orbán will stick to the strategy his party has followed up to now?

Following the FIDESZ defeat in the 2002 general election, Orbán disappeared from day to day politics. He is occasionally to be seen on various forums, for instance, I heard him speak in Vienna. He is a professional politician, who has understood that a double strategy—keeping a low profile while others argue—can be effective. Something similar can be observed with respect to the line followed by FIDESZ: plenty of voters are attracted by the declaration of conservative, Christian, national, and at the same time, to a certain extent, European values, as well as by rhetorical expressions of solidarity for the Hungarian minorities living in neighbouring countries. In this regard, FIDESZ can congratulate themselves and keep on this track.

FIDESZ organised a "national petition" demanding parliamentary discussion on changes in the budget and certain legislation packages.

I have never heard of an opposition party attempting such a thing anywhere else. I have no idea how many people signed this petition but I saw a great number of people collecting signatures and it seems that the approach has worked. And this shows that there are political factors in present-day Hungary that the other side and the intellectual elite of Hungary has underestimated, ignored or only partly understood, and so they did not know how to counter them.

What do you think about the performance and relative success of the Alliance of Free Democrats and the Hungarian Democratic Forum, which were the two major parties of the transition era? Will the Free Democrats be the party that can, at some future point, tip the scale by entering into alliance with either of the two major parties?

I believe the success of both parties is a positive sign, since it would be unfortunate if voters in Hungary had only two parties to choose between. There needs to be a liberal, reformist party in Hungary; and there needs to be a conservative, center-right party in the Western European style, similar to the CDU or the CSU in Germany or the ÖVP in Austria, which is not willing to advocate or put up with everything just for the sake of attracting voters. As far as the quality of political discourse is concerned, I think it is a positive development that none of the extremist parties got a seat in the European Parliament and that the chances of the Alliance of Free Democrats have improved. This means, or so I hope at least, that there will be less hatred and more intelligence, more patience and openness in political debate, a diminution of the kind of seething anger one so often encounters when reading Hungarian papers. But for someone looking at the situation from the outside, the decisive factor remains the performance of FIDESZ.

Going back to the make-up of the European Parliament, has anything changed now that the European People's Party won 269 seats, the Socialist Party 199, the

liberals 64, with 100 eurosceptic and anti-Union MEPs, quite a few of them from the far right?

The proportion of conservative and socialist representatives has barely changed. But lets not forget that the European Parliament has populists not only on the right but also on the left. In the Czech Republic, the only country in the region which was a democracy during the interwar period, the Communist Party got eighteen per cent of the votes, while the social democrats only achieved eleven. Similarly, in Germany, the PDS party, appealing to those nostalgic for the GDR, achieved amazing results in Thuringia and other East German Länder. In other words, there is danger lurking not only on the right but also on the left, with the ghosts of the communist era haunting the region. Eurosceptic populists achieved unexpected results in Austria, Holland and Sweden. The greatest danger is that these extremist groups, whether on the left or on the right, will be able to hinder constructive political work. There are, of course, positive signs as well, such as the losses suffered by Le Pen in France and by Haider's Freedom Party in Austria. In sum, the EU today is just as diverse and multicultural as Europe itself: in some countries the conservatives have the upper hand, in others the socialists or the liberals, and the European elections have reflected this diversity—they have reflected the stupidity, the successes and the failures. In any event, today's European Union is going to be harder to govern than yesterday's. But for most if not all people, their own country comes first, which is why, for instance, Romano Prodi is returning to Italian politics.

Could the EU have reached the point where centrifugal forces begin to outweigh the centripetal ones? Could it be that Hungary has gained admission to an elite club which is no longer what Hungarians were so eager to join?

One of the possibilities for the EU was development towards a supranational body with a common military force, a common foreign policy and a common currency. The monetary part has been accepted by everyone but the British, the Swedes and the Danes. But thus far nothing has come true of the other dreams. The other possibility was the transformation of the EU into a "hallowed" free trade zone. Already today, the EU means more than that, much more in fact. Thus the question now is whether this process can be continued or will any further experimentation with additional transnational elements simply strengthen centrifugal forces. Although we must choose between these, the EU has already weathered a number of crises. Its future depends mainly on whether the economic situation improves. Speaking for myself, I do not think that the EU will become a transnational state. I think it is going to remain a loose—that is to say, only regionally strong—confederation of states in which individual states, and the national interests they purport, for better or worse, to represent, continue to enjoy primacy. That said, the story of the EU is still the greatest success story of the twentieth and (let's hope) of the twenty-first century. ❧

Tünde Melinda Dóra

After the Fall

Viewing the fall of the Berlin wall, the sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf made his famous prediction, saying "It will take six months to reform the political systems, six years to change the economic systems, and sixty years to effect a revolution in hearts and minds." Now, fifteen years into the life of the Hungarian Republic, one fourth of the way to Dahrendorf's final deadline, his prediction still seems to hold true. A whole generation, thrust from the world of zero redundancy and virtually no competition into the ratrace for which they had no real skills, finds itself near pension, and far from peace.

Zsuzsa's story

In 1989, the recently widowed Zsuzsa (with three children) was one of the two caretakers at a state-owned transport service company. She earned 8000 forints ($40)[1] a month making sure that all the taps were in working order, that there was toilet paper in the lavatories, that the cleaning ladies came on time and that everything was functioning. "I only had to actually work about four hours a day," she laughs, remembering the easy pace shared by most jobs of the socialist era. She had been working there for 13 years, and had thought she would stay there until she reached retirement age. Her company was making one last effort to become competetive. Partly by doing away with her superfluous position.

Unexpectedly she and her children were saved by a job at a new private company importing household chemicals. "I knew it would be hard physical work, unloading the trucks that brought the goods, but I did not have any qualifications, so I accepted the fact that I would have to do physical work," she says. And it was good money, double what she had been earning at the state company, and with yearly premiums of 80,000 forints ($380). She felt proud that she was able to provide so well for her children.

The years passed, the upheavals in state-owned companies left more and more people jobless. New colleagues, entering the company with the new threat of not being able to buy food for their families, worked in a state close to panic.

1 ■ All currencies calculated at 2004 exchange rates.

Tünde Melinda Dóra
is a journalist on the daily Magyar Hírlap.

Backbiting reached a level that was unknown even in the bored cafeterias of socialist workplaces. "I had never learnt how to protect my interests, there was always someone to protect them for me. My parents, my husband, the state."

In 1994, which would bring the greatest drop in living standards since the wars, competing with the others for a job that payed less and less proved too much for her. Zsuzsa spent that year on sick leave. "I felt my body was telling me: I can't take this stress. And anyway, why should I? For a new television set when the old works just fine?"

When she returned to work, she had already decided that she would let them fire her and reap the redundancy money. "I really had to talk myself into registering for the dole, because all my life being without work had been out of the question."

At the age of 50, Zsuzsa, who had dropped out of secondary school because she wanted to earn money for clothes and things again found dropping out her solution. She cleans for a couple of families and, having passed 55, is getting a pension.

She is still sometimes swept away by the lure of things and is wistful as she describes the new kitchen cabinets of one of her employers, among the many new home-owners who were able to take advantage of a government-supported mortgage scheme started in 2001.

Most social scientists think the Hungarian society is now past the big systemic changes. As political scientist László Kéri comments, "The long period of transition when the institutions [of demo-cracy] were established is now finished, and the new period of consolidation has begun."

Analysts at Tárki, a social research center and data bank, identify four old-new social classes.[2] The absolute winners of the first 15 years of the market economy among the 10 million people living in Hungary are the 1-1,2 million members of the upper middle class whose lot has improved significantly. There are note-worthy individual variations, but most of the 3 million member middle class has also profited from the market economy.

The post-transition changes in the labour market have, however, left many of the 4 million skilled or unskilled labourers high and dry. And on top of that they seem stuck: even when the mid-90s economic recession gave space to rapid growth, this class only benefited little, and there have been practically no government schemes which they could benefit from. Perhaps this is also why it is usually the least mobile social groups with the lowest status which expect the government to take an active role in lessening social inequality. But the workers are still luckier than the last 20 per cent of the population, who are left clinging to the government and are very poor.

Hungary continues to be an egalitarian society. For one, social inequalities in Hungary are still considered small compared to many other European countries[3]. And whenever there is greater inequality, such as in the period between 2000 and 2003, people, whatever their social status, tend to be less content. Yet in everyday life, any differences are amplified by the fact that social mobility is now much lower in Hungary[4] than in what was formerly called the "the capitalist West".

2 ■ *Tárki Háztartási Monitor 2004.* (Tárki Household Monitor 2004)

3 ■ There are conflicting studies of inequality in Hungary, mostly due to different methodology. Some place Hungary in the least inequal group, while others consider it average.

4 ■ *Tárki Háztartási Monitor 2004.*

Re-evaluation of qualifications

There is some confusion as to how these classes were formed. Many people perceive the transition as chaotic, but according to recent surveys,[5] few people actually changed their occupations. In the past 15 years, 20 per cent of the men's and 15 per cent of the women's careers have improved. Many switched to lower status, but higher pay careers, but at least 10 per cent of the generation active in 1989 had to make do with jobs that allowed them only lower living standards. University degrees without job market skills were often only enough to get a job on an assembly line in an electronics factory.

This caused uneasiness because in the socialist era earnings and status were handed out in strict correlation with learning and experience. The fact that you would get a larger salary if you spoke two foreign languages than if you only spoke one was one of the fundamental certainties of life. In a market economy of course, it all depends on what the languages are and what the demand for them is.

A classic joke from the middle of the 90s perfectly portrays society's perplexion at what it perceived as the unpredictable value of qualifications. Józsi bácsi, the old alcoholic, leaves the detoxication unit one morning and staggers straight to the job center. He tells the young man behind the table that he would like to find a job that keeps him occupied, does not require qualifications, and which does not pay enough for him to have enough money to buy alcohol. The employee leafs through his papers and picks one.

"There's a nice opening for a crane technician here. You would need to get some training, but it's only a month," suggests the young man.

"And how much does it pay, son?" asks Józsi bácsi.

"Oh, about 60,000, but that's negotiable."

"You don't understand, son. I don't want to go back to detox," the old alcoholic says, "find something that pays less."

The employee shrugs, and gets another pack of papers. "How about this one, Józsi bácsi? It does not require any skills, all you need to do is lick envelopes closed."

"And? How much is it?," he demands.

"40,000 forints a month," the employee replies, a bit worried that the old man will stalk off enraged at the low amount.

"You see son, I can live off 20,000 and still spend the rest on vodka," wily Józsi bácsi explains. "Don't you have anything for 20,000?"

"But Józsi bácsi, for that you would need a university degree," the young man exclaims.[6]

Other signs of stabilisation

The financial expectations of the populace also seem to point in the direction of consolidation. The average monthly income was about 88,000 forints per person[7] ($417) in 2003, which is still only about a third of the EU average. On the other hand, it is almost three times the amount of the Hungarian minimum wage[8], which should mean that people with average income live well.

5 ■ *Tárki Háztartási Monitor 2004.*

6 ■ Tellingly, the newest version of this joke involves graduates with a BA in economics. It goes "What does a computer programmer tell an economist? A cheeseburger and coke, please."

7 ■ Net figure according to the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH). Because of the high level of tax evasion, however, the actual average is supposed much higher.

8 ■ This data is of dubious significance, because it is often argued that the minimum wage is not enough to provide for a minimum living standard.

A more reliable quantifier of general living standards, per capita gross domestic product (GDP), also shows that Hungary has regained and surpassed the purchasing power it had before transition recession struck. Per capita GDP has risen from 201,577 forint in 1990 to 3,648,227 forint in 2002.[9]

But what has changed perhaps even more is how people perceive the state of their financial affairs. They feel poor, but not as poor as previously, and they are now more hopeful about their future.[10] Nothing demonstrates this more aptly than the fact that they are willing to take out 10–20 year mortgage loans to move into new flats and houses. In fact, market research implies that 12 per cent of the population has some sort of bank loan.[11] Personal bank loans are actually the most widespread in Hungary compared to the other members of the Visegrád Four.

Perhaps the most telling sign that the transition is near its end or is coming close to completion is how people relate to the political shift itself. GfK's 2003 survey shows that Hungarians are now as happy about it as they were back in 1991, before transition recession took its toll on enthusiasm. More than 30 per cent of the answers showed satisfaction about the fact that democracy was declared. The elite was the happiest about it (41 per cent), while 67 per cent of the working class expressed disappointment. Strangely enough, the reverse of this was true when they were asked about their living standards: workers tended to be more satisfied than the intelligentsia. Young people (age 15–30) were the most satisfied with their financial situation and their life as such.

Net monthly wage/salary per capita and real wages/salaries per earner

	HUF	%, compared to 1990
1991	12,948	93
1992	15,628	91,7
1993	18,397	88,1
1994	23,049	94,5
1995	25,891	82,9
1996	30,544	78,8
1997	38,145	82,7
1998	45,162	85,6
1999	50,076	87,7
2000	55,785	89
2001	64,913	94,7
2002	77,622	107,6

Source: KSH

Per capita GDP (gross, HUF)

1980	67,339
1990	201,577
1991	241,476
1992	285,040
1993	344,707
1994	425,365
1995	537,083
1996	676,315
1997	841,039
1998	1,006,575
1999	1,112,915
2000	1,290,014
2001	1,457,621
2002	3,648,227

Source: KSH

9 ■ KSH–Hungarian Central Statistical Office

10 ■ According to the Hungarian branch of the international market research company GfK, 17 per cent of Hungarians queried in a 1000-person survey were satisfied with their financial status, and the percentage of people who felt their living standard had taken a downturn compared to a decade ago is decreasing. In 1999, more than 60 per cent thought their situation had deteriorated, while in 2003, only 15 per cent felt a lot poorer and 31 per cent somewhat poorer. More than half of the replies indicated a trust that they would reach a living standard acceptable to them within 5 years, which indicates a return to the optimism at the beginning of the transition.

11 ■ GfK–Hungária Market Research Institute.

As a matter of fact, most analysts establish that age does have a lot to do with which class any individual might belong to. In this respect, jobs proved to be everything. And what work a person got was often decided by how and when they entered the job market. Older is not necessarily better for two reasons: unlearning previously ingrained behaviour is difficult and stressful, while all previous experience is of dubious value in the new economic environment.

Most analysts claim that age is a major factor determining the class an indvidual belongs to. In this respect, jobs proved to be decisive. What work someone did was often determined by how and when they entered the labour market. Older is not necessarily better for two reasons: unlearning previously ingrained behaviour is difficult and stressful, and much previous experience is of dubious value in the new economic environment.

According to a prestige-index based on living standards and social esteem calculated by Tárki, the generation highest on the social ladder is comprised of those who have never been unemployed. Even though their wages only keep rising until they are 43–44 years of age. It is a promising sign that sudents are ranked even higher than those who got their first jobs in the market economy and those who had experience, but were without a job for some time. The oldest age group, called the lost generation, because they had already retired in 1989, enjoyes a somewhat lower prestige, but is still held in higher esteem than those who have left their jobs between 1989 and 2002 for reasons of age or because they could not find work. Newcomers to the labour market who have not yet managed to successfully enter it are at the bottom as regards social status, states Tárki.

The generation which has lost faith and health

The saying "you never know" has taken up a whole new meaning in the lives of those who grew up with socialist rules and had to learn the new rules of surviving in a market economy whilst the new rules were being established. The generation which in Tárki's estimation has given the biggest winners and the biggest losers of the transition will never be able to forget that the world can and does turn upside down in exactly one moment. Especially since those between 40–50 years old in 1989 were the most likely to have families to support, and thus had even more pressure on them to survive and to ride the crest of the wave of changes. Regardless of whether they came out winners or losers, they were, and still are, in constant fear of falling off the car of transition and being left behind.

Mária Kopp, professor of behavioural studies at the Semmelweis University of Medicine in Budapest sees this as the explanation for the so called Eastern European mortality paradox. In essence, the paradox is that many more middle agers die in Eastern Europe than what is explicable by living circumstances, genetic heritage and any other quantifiable and verifiable factors. As a matter of fact, proprotionately more Hungarian men of 45–60 years of age and middle-aged women supporting families die each year of the 21st century than in any given year of the Second World War. Death rates of this age group were last in this range in the 1930s—before the widespread use of antibiotics. This peaked in 1994, at the height of post-transition recession, when more middle aged men died than when modern medicine was unavailable. Mortality levelled off somewhat by 2001, when 15 out of every 1000 men died in the age group 50–54. (Which is still higher

than the comparable rates of 1930.) After age 60, Hungarian mortality decreases to a normal rate similar to that of the Netherlands.

What is making people die early? Apparently tuberculosis, bacterial infections and the flu are not as deadly to humans as society in flux. Yet one puzzling factor is that the mortality paradox did not come into existence directly after 1989, but in the 70s and 80s. This was the period when the so called "second economy", the golden age of semi-private enterpreneurship began. In Mária Kopp's view, this shows that it is not the transition itself, but a fear of lagging behind in a competition with unclear rules that made stress deadly for many Hungarian heads of family.

"Stress and competition are not harmful," she points out "but chronic stress is". If the biological function of stress is to get you on on your toes, ready for action to avoid harm or danger, then it is easy to see that chronic stress produces exhaustion and debilitating fear, which makes mistakes more difficult to avoid.

The fear of falling behind

Social status is no longer a genuine question of life and death, as medical treatment and means of subsistence are available to anyone and everyone. Survival is not an issue. Yet, according to Mária Kopp, it becomes one through individuals' thoughts, beliefs and self-esteem. Humans being civilised social animals, "harm" and "danger" is a question of definition based on the virtues the individual would like to see in him or herself. Precisely how sophisticated things such as social status and self perception translate into biological data is a question for further research.

A constant fear of deteriorating socio-economic status is recognised as a threat to health in civilised societies. Studies show that even in the UK where general social upheaval is not an issue, an unskilled worker's lifespan is ten years shorter than that of a professional man or woman, even if he/she does not drink or smoke more.

Also, research shows that if an individual is in circumstances which he/she cannot reliably influence, he or she "learns" helplessness. "In humans, this state of mind can be brought on by situations which seem insoluble, such as a bad relationship or the threat of long-term unemployment," Mária Kopp comments. This condition not only causes a lack of initiative, but can actually biologically reduce learning ability through the deterioration of a group of cells in the hippocampus in the brain.

Thus, according to these theories, new or dangerous circumstances only lead to a loss of health if the feeling of competence and control is absent. This can also take form in a state of clinical depression, which is more widespread in transitional societies than stable ones. Depression often accompanies cardiovascular illness, which is the most frequent cause of death among the 45–60 year old. The regional "depression map" of Hungary is almost the mirror image of the mortality map of the 45-60 group, which indicates that there is a strong correlation between psychological factors and the deaths of heads of family.

The drag of the black market past

While the psychological and health effects of the transition shock are not entirely clear, the collapse of the socialist welfare system has had pretty straightforward consequences. Those who were already responsible adults in the socialist era not only bore the brunt of changes during the conversion to a market economy, they will also have to work for much

longer than is the EU average in order to supplement their pensions. There are several reasons for this, the least of which is that Hungary's population is getting older and thus payments into state and private pension funds will eventually decrease.

A more significant problem is that inflation, high taxes and relatively low income levels as well as a stubbornly slow rise of productivity have forced many former employees partly or completely into the black economy. Employers, in order to save costs and avoid having to raise wages and salaries, in essence pushed several hundred thousand people working in the services sector into a sort of fictitious freelance position in which the companies had all the rights and the "subcontractors" had none of the rights guaranteed by law to employees. Why did taxi drivers, actors, cameramen and security guards stand for it? Because they were afraid for their jobs and because they got more money this way, since they could avoid a lot of taxes.

Many of them are only now realising that the amount of their monthly pension will be calculated on the basis of their official income, not what they actually lived off. That is, in most cases, barely above the minimum wage.

According to a recently published study, at least 700 000 people pay no taxes on their income, which means that every sixth active worker is payed illegally. János Kutas and Sándor Ádám, authors of the study, calculate that if these people earn at least the minimum wage, that means that 300–420 billion forint (1,2–1,7 billion euros) is payed out without any contribution to pension funds, healthcare or government functions. "The high proportion of black market labour not only makes the lowering of taxes difficult, but impairs the financing of the social network," they point out.

So far, the energetic government programme initiated to combat this monumental relic of the period of "unbridled capitalism" has foundered. The Ministry of Labour is slowly realising that a declaration of amnesty and a threat of retroactive tax payment might not be enough to bring the companies employing workers illegally back into the fold. ❧

John Lukacs

A Final Chapter on Churchill

I was 16 years old in Hungary in 1940, when Hitler's Germans conquered Europe and he marched into Paris. Few Americans know what it meant to live in the middle of Europe then; few of them know it now. A generation after the war, in 1977, Irving Kristol, founding father of the neo-conservatives, reminisced in *The New York Times Magazine* about 1940, when he and his friends "were divided between devotees of Stalin and devotees of Trotsky." "It was an authentic intellectual milieu," Kristol wrote, "it was between the Trotskyists and Stalinists in City College that the war of the world was being fought." This, when the war of the world was being fought in the skies over England, between Hitler and Churchill.

Our forlorn hopes focused on Churchill. My mother adored him. I was a budding historian then, silly about many things, and with vast gaps in my knowledge of the world; but one thing I understood then that I have known ever since, which is how close Hitler came to winning the Second World War. What I did not know then was that Roosevelt and Stalin would win the Second World War. What I knew then and what I know now is that Churchill was the one who did not lose it.

Five years later the war was over. I had not lost my life, but I lost my native country; I chose to flee from it to America and to become a professional historian. Ever since then, my memories and my knowledge of May and June 1940 have been burning in my mind, in a symbiotic way: my memories have not faded as my knowledge about history has increased—but are memory and knowledge different? Yes and no.

John Lukacs

is a Budapest-born historian, living and teaching in the U.S. since 1946. He is author of more than 20 books including Budapest 1900 *(1988),* Confessions of an Original Sinner *(1990),* The Duel: Hitler vs. Churchill 10 May–31 July 1940 *(1990),* The End of the Twentieth Century—The End of the Modern Age *(1993),* A Thread of Years *(1999) and, most recently,* Churchill: Visionary, Statesman, Historian *(2004).*

From dribs and drabs of all kinds of reading, I began to suspect that before Churchill rose to become a heroic figure in 1940 his position was by no means as strong and secure as it appeared but a few months later. But that suspicion was part and parcel of a larger and more definite knowledge, which was that Hitler could have very well won the Second World War in 1940 (and even in 1941); and that, therefore, there was this Last European War, 1939-41, before Pearl Harbor, a detailed and structured history of which ought to be written.

That took me almost six years, interrupted by the illness and death of my first dear wife in 1970. Then I had a stroke of luck. That year, the British goverment decided to shorten the closure of government documents from 50 to 30 years. Thereby the papers from 1940 were made available to researchers in 1971. I spent a hot three weeks in London in the old Public Record Office and found what I wanted—most of all the War Cabinet records of late May 1940. Yes—Churchill's situation before and during the first days and nights of Dunkirk was insecure, to say the least. Most of the Conservatives in Parliament accepted his prime ministership reluctantly; his appointment was followed by disaster after disaster on the fronts; his determination to keep fighting, at no matter what cost, seemed less and less reasonable or promising. But while he was determined, Hitler was hesitant, not quite sure what to do before Dunkirk. Still I could not devote more than two pages to that dramatic contrast; I was, after all, writing a book about an entire continent and more than two years of a world war. Thus, The Last European War, September 1939–December 1941.

A dozen years later I returned to Churchill. My then editor at Ticknor & Fields, John Herman (since then my close friend), agreed to my proposal to write *The Duel: 10 May–31 July 1940: the Eighty-Day Struggle between Churchill and Hitler.* Again, I spent a fair amount of time in the Public Record Office, now in Kew, found even more evidence than before, and wrote some 15 pages about those crucial days of May 1940. I had an advantage that I had not had in 1971, which was photocopying. But when I finished the final draft of *The Duel,* I threw the accumulated mess of those photocopied pages away. That was a foolish thing to do, because eight years later I decided to write yet another book, concentrating on a day-by-day (and sometimes hour-by-hour) reconstruction of what happened in London from May 24 to May 28 in 1940.

During those secret War Cabinet sessions there occurred a verbal duel, not between Churchill and Hitler but between Churchill and Lord Halifax, the Foreign Secretary, who—and, let me say, not quite unreasonably—was convinced that Churchill was hotheaded; that, in that given and dangerous situation, there ought to be at least a crack open in the British door, to ascertain what Hitler would want from Britain. But Churchill, warmhearted rather than hotheaded, was right. He pulled through—by a hairbreadth, not more.

Those five days were dramatic. No one knew about the drama beyond the

War Cabinet: not Roosevelt, not the Americans, no one among the press lords and journalists in Britain. *Five Days in London, May 1940* was a modest success, even commercially. Two days after September 11, 2001, Rudy Giuliani, the mayor of New York, held it up before the television cameras, declaring how inspired he was reading about Churchill and British courage during the London blitz in 1940. Well, there is not one word about the blitz in *Five Days...* but no matter: the next day, multiple book orders began to flicker on the screens of the Yale University Press offices in New Haven. "Will your next book be *Three Hours in London*?" a friend asked. "No, it won't," I said.

But something else was happening. During the years between *The Duel* and *Five Days,* I worked on a study of Hitler and his biographers. Among other things, my reading and research confirmed another, related matter, which I had known but to which I had not devoted much attention before: that Hitler hated Churchill more than he hated anyone else among his great adversaries (he had a considerable respect and even liking for Stalin); that many Germans, and not only neo-Nazis, had similar inclinations; that sympathisers of Hitler and of the Third Reich, such as David Irving, have thought it best to whiten Hitler's reputation by blackening Churchill's.

And then, Marlis G. Steiner, a fine scholar and one of the better Hitler biographers, directed me to something peculiar and disturbing. The papers of a high Gestapo chief, Heinrich Müller (who may have been brought secretly to the United States after the war by Allen Dulles), were published by a small right-wing publisher in California. They included the transcripts of two secret telephone conversations between Churchill and Roosevelt.

I had known about those. Technicians of the German Ministry of Posts had established a listening post on the North Sea coast of Holland, where they were occasionally able to break into secret telephone lines in London. One transcript of a Churchill–Roosevelt conversation (on July 28, 1943) had been printed in a German collection of documents; it seemed authentic. But this was different. In these Müller "transcripts," Churchill appeared brutal, ordering assassinations, conspiring with Roosevelt about what might happen at Pearl Harbor, etc. I found his very language implausible. I tried to look into the matter, including a search for the original Post Ministry transcripts in various German archives. I found nothing.

Then I struck gold. Through Lady Soames, née Mary Churchill, Winston's surviving daughter and now a friend, I got in touch with an Englishwoman who had had the authority to listen in to the secret Churchill–Roosevelt telephone talks as a "censor." She remembered them more than a half-century later. She assured me that the "documents" were false from beginning to end. I wrote a brief article about this skulduggery for *American Heritage* (November/ December 2002). Alas, there were, and are still, historians who have used the Müller documents for their own purposes. (The great Spanish historian Rafael Altamira y Crevea once wrote

that history consists of more than documents—not to speak of falsified ones.)

I did not bother to recount this matter in a small book of essays, *Churchill: Visionary, Statesman, Historian,* published last year—really my last book about Churchill—which included my own diary entries about Churchill's funeral in 1965, to which I had flown with my 8-year-old son from Toulouse, France, where I had been serving as a Fulbright Professor that year. But during my reading for a long chapter, "Churchill's Historianship," something else caught my attention. I had known that, alone among Western statesmen, Churchill showed a fair amount of sympathy, and even understanding, for the situation of my native country, Hungary, even during the Second World War. Reading and rereading the more than 2,000 pages of his *Marlborough: His Life and Times,* I was stunned to find that he had written many pages about Hungary in the early eighteenth century, at a time when few, if any, people in Western Europe had the slightest interest in the fortunes and the political conditions of that country. Churchill's writing reflected a rather astonishing amount of knowledge, and also great insight and understanding. Subsequently, I proposed and then gave a talk at the British Embassy in Budapest about "Churchill and Hungary."

It was at that point that a thought occurred to me: Why not name a street after him in Budapest? There would be a proper place for that. The great Chain Bridge, connecting Buda and Pest, planned and commissioned by the great Anglophile Hungarian historical personality, Count István Széchenyi, was built by a Scottish engineer, Adam Clark, after whom a square is still named at the Buda bridgehead. Why not name a "Churchill Bridgehead" on the Pest side? I took the liberty of proposing that to the mayor's office.

Nothing happened for awhile, and I could devote no attention to it: My darling second wife fell ill and died five months later. Then, another idea: Fly to Budapest and make my proposal again (this time on paper, summing up Churchill's interest and sympathies for Hungary) and then play a trump card. "You do this—and I shall bring Churchill's daughter (also an amateur historian) to Budapest for the inauguration." They jumped at it. No, a Churchill Bridgehead won't work; but an attractive small street, a Churchill Walk, would be established in the City Park. "All right," I said. A great and good friend of mine approached Imre Varga, the now most famous Hungarian sculptor, to make a Churchill bust, to be erected in a small bower along that Churchill Walk, and in time for Lady Soames's visit and the inauguration on June 24 of that year, 2003.

So it happened. There came a social whirl. The Hungarian ambasador and his wife in London gave a dinner for Mary Soames, with a dozen Englishmen and Englishwomen who knew her and me, and what a sprightly occasion that was! Two days later, we were flown to Budapest, gossiping and drinking champagne on the plane. That night, there was a box for us in the Budapest Opera, its interior all raspberry-coloured marble, to hear Tchaikovsky's *The Queen of Spades* which was interminably long and wearisome, but no matter. The day of the

inauguration was very hot, and the mayor spoke at length. Again, no matter. The Hungarian national anthem and "God Save the Queen" were played, and my eyes were full of tears. If only my mother could see this... Is "see" the right word? I believe in another world; but whether she sees it or not, perhaps—perhaps—she'll *know.*

Two days later, I bid good-bye to Mary. I told her how grateful I was to her, but also that a chapter of my life had now closed. I am not a Churchill specialist, and I shall write nothing more about her father. But now there is a street named after him and a statue of him in my native city. I have done a duty. Things have come full circle. A chapter of my life, in the odd way in which the personal and the professional intertwine, has ended.

Two days after I returned from Budapest, both my fax and telephone rang. Young vandals, most presumably devotees of the former Hungarian National Socialist Arrow-Cross Party, had poured red paint over Churchill's bust, tied the ribbon from a wreath around his neck, and scrawled a swastika and a six-pointed Jewish star on the marker of the Churchill Walk. Was this a coda, or an epilogue, to that chapter of my life? Or more than that? By coincidence (G.K. Chesterton said: "Coincidences are spiritual puns."), I had just finished reading Günter Grass's *Crabwalk,* dealing with young neo-Nazis, in which Grass's last sentences are: "It is not over. It will never be." I feel this in my bones and see it, clearly.

And yet: another telephone call from Budapest this morning, as I write. The statue and the marker have been cleaned up in less than a day. A group of citizens has already raised the money for the entire restoration expenses. I am—again—reminded of one of the Duc de La Rochefoucauld's maxims: "Things are never as good—or as bad—as they seem." And history is both the recorded and the remembered past. They cannot be separated, but a historian must attempt to be honest about both. ❧

George Gömöri

"The Mikes"

A Circle of Hungarian Intellectuals in Holland

When István Tüski, József Végh and Miklós Tóth first met in Utrecht in 1951 and decided to form a discussion group to bring together young Hungarian exiles living in the Netherlands, nobody imagined that it would lead to one of the unmitigated success stories of the Hungarian diaspora. For this first meeting marked the beginning of the Kelemen Mikes Circle, named after an eighteenth-century Transylvanian Hungarian exile in Turkey, who is now regarded as the father of modern Hungarian prose. Between 1951 and 1959 Hungarian students and intellectuals living in Holland continued to meet on a regular basis both in Utrecht and Amsterdam; they formed a folk-dancing group which appeared on Dutch TV and they published essays on Hungarian–Dutch connections in the past. These contacts had been numerous and lively, due to the fact that the majority of Dutchmen were Protestant and that from the 1620s the Hungarian Reformed Church gained great benefits from sending young theologians to the universities of Franeker, Leyden, Utrecht and Groningen. Upon their return to Hungary or Transylvania (a semi-independent Protestant state for most of the 17th century) some of these theologians brought back new ideas vital for modernisation. The educationalist János Apáczai Csere, author of the *Magyar Encyclopœdia* (Utrecht, 1653), is just one of these, initiating much-needed reforms in Transylvania. In the 18th century, when Hungarian Protestants still suffered serious restrictions in their own country, several editions of the Protestant Hungarian Bible were published on Dutch soil, most in Utrecht. Contacts between Holland and Hungary flourished up to the twentieth century, and at the present time about eight to ten thousand Hungarians live in the Netherlands. Many of these had emigrated there after the suppression of the 1956 Revolution by Soviet troops; those young refugees who then joined the Kelemen Mikes Circle contributed much to its success in coming years.

Kelemen Mikes himself had no connection with the Netherlands, but this hardly

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is a Hungarian poet, translator and essayist, Retired Lecturer at the University of Cambridge, and Honorary Fellow of Darwin College. His latest book Erdélyi merítések *(Transylvanian Catches) appeared in Kolozsvár (Cluj, Romania) in 2004.*

mattered. The name itself had the attraction of instant recognition by Hungarians living in different countries in Europe and, when the Circle launched the first of its Study Days *(Tanulmányi napok)* in 1959, the response was overwhelming. The idea for the Study Days was Dezső Prágay's, a research chemist who left Hungary in 1956 and took up a post at the University of Utrecht. Doorn, a small Dutch spa was chosen as the venue of the very first Study Days; there, in an old mansion (the Maarten Maartenshuis) in the middle of a pine-studded park, different generations of the Hungarian emigration met and listened to lectures on politics, culture and science. The writers László Cs. Szabó and Zoltán Szabó came over from England to give thoughtful lectures, Father Gellért Békés, editor of the Catholic monthly *Katolikus Szemle* came from Rome to address the conference; editors of the Munich-based *Új látóhatár* were also present, as well as editors of the Brussels-based democratic Socialist review *Szemle*. Of the younger generation the literary scholar Áron Kibédi Varga, the historian László Péter and the economist István Zádor (who died tragically soon afterwards) gave the most interesting lectures. For those who attended that Doorn conference it was a memorable event indeed, lively, exciting, thought-provoking and, though the Study Days have been held every year since, in a sense unsurpassable.

From 1960 to 1972 the Study Days of the Kelemen Mikes Circle took place in different places, most often near Leyden, Enkhuizen and in Vaeshartelt near Maastricht. Holland boasts of many "conference centres" and the Mikes organizers chose, on the whole, good venues, though sometimes the living conditions were not the most comfortable; I can recall cavernous dormitories in Vaeshartelt where, due to the loud snores among the occupants, sleeping was almost impossible! Later on in Driebergen, Eefde and Elspeet, to name only a few places where Study Days were held, the situation improved, speakers as well as some participants earned the right to stay in single rooms. Accomodation may have improved over the years though the cuisine at the conference centres has not: some of the regular Mikes visitors could tell countless anecdotes about the shock experienced by them when confronted with certain speciments of Dutch food. While one did not expect delights of *haute cuisine,* when a meal consisted of just bread and butter with near-transparent slices of cheese or ham (alternatively you could pepper your bread with multicoloured ground sugar and finished with lukewarm tea). The drinks situation was admittedly better: conference centres made much of their money out of the bars open late into the night where you could drink excellent Heineken and strong jenever next to a talkative literary critic from Paris or a well-read scientist from Groningen.

Lectures on different subjects were organised round a central theme and speakers were invited from all over Europe and even from the United States and Canada. The Mikes meetings usually lasted for 2-3 days, mostly during weekends when local members could drop in to listen to a talk or two. The screening of a Hungarian film or a chamber concert was a regular part of the programme (once the composer György Kurtág and his wife gave a piano recital of Kurtág's new compositions) and literary evenings were a feature from Doorn onwards. From time to time, for example in 1995, when the main subject of the Study Days was Hungarian Literature, the literary evening surfaced as one of the most important events of the conference: it featured such well-known Hungarian writers as Péter Esterházy, László

Krasznahorkai, Aladár Lászlóffy, László Márton and Endre Karátson. In principle any participant could make a contribution to the literary evening, not just the writers and poets; in practice only the most daring 'secret' literati took up the challenge of facing the Mikes audience.

That particular "literary" Mikes meeting in Driebergen engendered a large number of anecdotes. One of these occurred during the debate that followed a lecture about the future of Hungarian literature in the twenty-first century. Pál Deréky, a lecturer in Hungarian literature from the University of Vienna and an expert on the history of the Avant garde, was musing about the possibilities of self-produced literature. According to him in the future anyone can 'borrow' a novel or a poem on the computer from a professional writer or poet and rewrite it according to his taste, so the author will become, in a sense, redundant. That means, said Deréky, that Hungarian literature as we know it, will cease to exist. Hearing this Péter Esterházy riposted "No, it won't—at least as long as I live".

The Kelemen Mikes Circle started out as an institution of Hungarian exiles, but its leaders (after Prágay had gone to settle in the US, mostly Sándor Németh and Áron Kibédi Varga) were aware of the importance of keeping an open mind vis-à-vis Hungary. Once the post-Stalinist Communist regime of János Kádár managed to consolidate and relax some of the worst restrictions imposed on the average Hungarian citizen, a dialogue with the 'old country' became possible. After some tentative contacts in 1967, several Hungarian writers and critics were invited to the Study Days in Amersfoort, and as they were granted exit visas by the authorities, a lasting link was established. Thanks to this opening in 1970, two more writers were able to attend the Mikes Days in Vaeshartelt who, while having an 'oppositionist' reputation, represented the best of contemporary Hungarian prose: Miklós Mészöly and György Konrád. Of them Mészöly returned some years later, accompanied by his wife Alaine Polcz whose wartime memoirs *Asszony a fronton* (A Woman's War) became one of the great surprises and best-sellers of post-1989 Hungarian literature.

Circle members and supporters came from all walks of life, but their interest in literature was underscored in 1980 by the establishment of the Kelemen Mikes Prize (a diploma and medal) awarded on a special forum at the Study Days called Hungarian Literary Observer. Each year a different writer or critic is asked to suggest candidates for this prize which can go to any writer regardless of his place of residence, so apart from Hungarians living in the West, it is awarded to writers from Hungary proper and also from countries with substantial Hungarian minorities (Romania, Slovakia and former Yugoslavia). The person who makes the award usually gives a *laudatio,* a speech appraising the work of the candidate(s) for the award, which is highly regarded by the Hungarian literary community.

In time the demand arose to publish some of the best lectures of the Study Days; collections of essays were published on a specific theme selected from subjects discussed at some of the Study Days, the contributors being former speakers. The first such collection, *Eszmék nyomában* (Tracing Ideas) was published in 1965; the next one, *Nyugati magyar irodalom* (Hungarian Literature in the West) in 1976. That year marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Circle and the occasion called for yet another volume, this time mostly consisting of essays, recollections, short stories or, in the case of poets, just the odd poem, dedicated to the Circle. The result was *Az*

embernek próbája (The Trial of Man, Amsterdam 1976), the work of twenty-eight contributors, amongst them philosophers, art crtics, mathematicians, linguists and a scientist engaged in brain research. Eight poets sent shorter or longer poems, two editors of the neo-Avantgarde literary journal *Magyar Műhely,* published in Paris, sent "texts", and the Hungarian-Swiss playwrigth Miklós Domahidy a playful exchange of nineteenth-century letters in verse. There was only one short play included in the collection, the London-based Victor Határ's *Álomtörténelem* (Dream-History) which was played from a tape at the 1975 Study Days. Interestingly, this is one of the few books in which both the ingenious Határ and his colleague from the Hungarian section of the BBC, the essayist László Cs. Szabó are *both* included there being, no love lost between these two leading literary figures of the Hungaian emigration. But then "the Mikes" was a forum which was not only open to every aesthetic view as long as it was presented coherently and intellectually respectably, but also a stage on which different generations clashed and confronted one another. This led to abuses on some occasions; I remember quite well the provocative antics of some members of the *Magyar Műhely* group which met with the strong disapproval of a famous old professor from Switzerland, but on the whole the Mikes conferences were lively, entertaining and—most importantly—thought-provoking.

This tradition prevailed into the 1990s, and even further, into the present century. Amongst the earlier publications of the Circle, particularly the collection *Belső tilalomfák* (Inner Taboo Poles) should be extolled for its courage to delve into issues 'blocked' and ignored both in and outside Hungary. It was edited by Endre Karátson and Ninon Neményi and, though published by the Mikes Circle in Holland, was printed in Munich at József Molnár's printing press in 1982. It contains eleven pieces including Peter Várdy's thorough examination of the history and present state of anti-Semitism in Hungary (originally given as a lecture at the 1980 Study Days). In 1991 the collection *A szó hatalma* (The Power of the Word) was published and six years later a heterogeneous but exciting volume entitled *Az új század küszöbén* (At the Threshold of the New Century) which, thanks to the propitious political changes in Hungary, was brought out by the Jelenkor publishing house at Pécs. The title of the last collection is indicative of the ambitions of the Kelemen Mikes Circle: it tries to keep its finger on the pulse of times following new developments in culture as well as science. In 2000 Florián Farkas, a young engineer who is a member of the Circle, started a website and an internet periodical, called "Mikes International". To give an idea of what can be found on this Hungarian-language website **federatio.org/mikes-per.html,** let me quote just a few titles from the last issue (July/September, 2004): "The Future of Religion(s)" an essay by Miklós Tóth, "Islam and the Reformation" by Victor Segesváry, "The Turkish Occupation and the Beginnings of the Reformation in Hungary", by Pál Németh, "The Achievement of László Cs. Szabó", by Géza Arday.

Of these authors Pál Németh, a minister of the Reformed Church and an expert on Islamic affairs, gave an illuminating talk at the 2002 Study Days in Elspeet, near Zutphen. The subject of this talk was the religious framework of Islam and its view of other cultures and religions. Whether this was the intention of the speaker or not, he impressed upon the audience that the monolithic and exclusive view of the fundamentalist followers of the Prophet Muhammad is that "whatever is in

the Koran is true, whatever is not, is unimportant". This leads to the chilling realisation that at present there is very little room for a real exchange of views between Muslims and non-Muslims whether the latter are Christians, Jews or Buddhists. Islam's frame of mind is thoroguhly 'medieval' and without something resembling the Christian Reformation within Islam, not much improvement can be expected in Christian–Muslim relations.

The Kelemen Mikes Circle of Holland is now over half a century old, but is constantly renewing itself; this year's Study Days in Elspeet will address another topical issue: the growing significance of Chinese and Japanese cultures for the rest of the world. Under the title 'Conquest of Cultures; these new developments will be discussed by speakers from Hungary, other European countries and the United States. As for the Hungarian season in the Netherlands taking place in the second half of 2004 and enjoying the support of the ministries of culture of both countries, it will not involve the Mikes Circle in any significant way though Áron Varga Kibédi, Professor Emeritus of the Free University of Amsterdam and a founding member of the Circle, will give a lecture on Hungarian culture in Leyden some time this autumn. Those young Hungarian writers and artists who will perform in Amsterdam or in The Hague should know, however, that the Kelemen Mikes Circle has played an important role in shaping the image of Hungary and its culture in Dutch society. It has been, and hopefully will remain, a bridge between two countries—a strong bridge built of books, music, fine arts, science and much goodwill. ❧

Alan Walker

Dohnányi's 1956 HMV Recordings

Some Unpublished Correspondence in the EMI Archives, Hayes, Middlesex

In July 1956, Dohnányi set out from his home in Tallahassee, Florida, in the company of his wife Ilona. They travelled first to New York, and then they boarded the Queen Mary for a long-awaited journey to England.[1]

Dohnányi had good reason to feel pleased at the prospect of such a trip. The previous December he had signed a contract with HMV to make some LP records of his own music. Moreover, he was also engaged to appear as a soloist at the International Edinburgh Festival, with his old friend Sir Adrian Boult and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. It was a welcome sign that his international career as a composer-pianist was once more taking wing, after having suffered a decline in the chaotic years immediately following the Second World War.

The Edinburgh Festival concerts were highly successful, the critics commenting on the youthful energy of Dohnányi's playing, his seventy-eight years notwithstanding. From Edinburgh Dohnányi travelled to London, the scene of so many of his early triumphs. It was from here that his career had been launched more than sixty years earlier, when he was only nineteen years old, and he had played Beethoven's G major Piano Concerto at a Queen's Hall Concert, conducted by Hans Richter. The critics had hailed him at that time as one of the foremost pianists of the day; shortly thereafter they were readily comparing him with Rachmaninov, Busoni and Godowsky. As he drove past Broadcasting House, where he had made a number of his earlier radio broadcasts, he could not have failed to observe the huge bomb-crater where Queen's Hall had once stood, until it had been brought down by one of Hitler's bombs in May 1941.

1 ■ A photograph of Ernst and Ilona von Dohnányi on the deck of the Queen Mary may be seen in Ilona's biography of her husband *A Song of Life*, edited by James A. Grymes, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2002, p.110.

Alan Walker

is the author of the three-volume, prize-winning biography of Franz Liszt, published by Alfred A Knopf, and editor, most recently, of The Death of Franz Liszt based on the Unpublished Diary of His Pupil Lina Schmalhausen, *Cornell University Press, 2003.*

On August 27, 1956, Dohnányi was brought from his hotel to the EMI recording studios on Abbey Road, North-West London, in order to try out the piano. We learn that he preferred a light action and wanted to check out the sound. The recording sessions began the following day, August 28. They unfolded across the next two weeks according to a rigorous schedule, and were devoted in their entirety to Dohnányi's own music. Aside from two major works for piano and orchestra with the RPO under Boult—the *Variations on a Nursery Theme,* and the Piano Concerto no. 2 in E minor—Dohnányi was also contracted to make two LPs of his solo piano music.

All the recording sessions were done at EMI's Abbey Road Studios, the solo piano sessions in Studio 3 and the piano and orchestra sessions in Studio 1. In those days stereo recordings were still at an experimental stage, but EMI had just started to record selective sessions in both Monaural and Stereo simultaneously, and this is how Dohnányi's own sessions were arranged. The kudos of having such an important composer-pianist in London was not something to be overlooked. A stereophonic back-up machine was used, but because the operator was placed in a separate room from the main sound engineers, and out of sight from them, his machine was not always synchronized with theirs. The result was that about twenty-per-cent of the recordings were not captured in stereo. The stereo versions were in any case not intended for immediate release, and for an obvious commercial reason: in 1956 the general public lacked the means to play them. That of course was to change dramatically within two or three years.

As for the mono versions, they were edited, heard and approved by Dohnányi, but were then subjected to a long delay before their release, a delay which resulted in an increasingly animated correspondence between the officials at EMI and Dohnányi's aggressive New York manager, Andrew Schulhof. The two works for piano and orchestra were eventually published in the summer of 1958 (on HMV ALP 1514), almost two years after they were recorded. The solo piano LPs, however, were delayed still further, and although they were at last released in Great Britain (on HMV ALP 1552 and 1553), a decision was taken not to release them at all in America, much to Dohnányi's dismay. This unusual determination had nothing to do with the quality of the performances but was rather the result of major restructuring that occurred at EMI. Briefly, the always uneasy relationship between HMV and its American partner RCA Victor had entered into a precipitous decline. The New York based Angel Records now became the chief partner in America of HMV recordings. Angel retained autonomy over its own catalogue, however, and since it was now in a race to establish itself exclusively in the field of stereo recordings, it declined to accept the Dohnányi monaural LPs, fearing a financial loss. It was a complicated arrangement for EMI. Dohnányi's recordings had been caught in the middle of both a management and a technological shake-up, and suffered accordingly.

Dohnányi worked extremely hard to produce the very best performances of his music. He was in his 79th year, and although his legendary technique was now showing signs of decline, and there were a fair number of retakes, the pure musi-

cality of his playing remained undimmed. The archival documents reveal a work-load of such intensity as to put many a younger pianist to shame. On the morning of August 28 he met his producer Peter Andry in Studio 3, and recorded the Six Piano Pieces, op. 41 in their entirety. He returned next day to record his Intermezzo in F minor, op. 2 no. 3; his Ruralia Hungarica (no 6,); his "Pastorale" on a Hungarian Christmas song; and his "Winterreigen" Suite. The pace then quickened, and on August 31 he recorded the first takes of his Suite in the Olden Style, op. 24. Because September 1 and 2 coincided with a weekend, there were no recording sessions on those days. But on Monday, September 3, Dohnányi was back in the studio to record his "Variations on a Pavane from the Sixteenth century", op. 17, and his concert arrangement of Schubert's "Valse nobles"; and he continued to do retakes of his earlier performances throughout the rest of that week.

In the middle of all this solo work, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and Sir Adrian Boult arrived in Studio 1, and on September 5, and for the next two days, Dohnányi recorded his Piano Concerto in E minor. That was followed by the "Nursery" Variations on September 10 and 11. His orchestral producer was the venerable Lawrence Collingwood. These gruelling sessions were concluded on September 12 with some final retakes of the Gavotte and Musette, and of selected movements from the *Suite in the Olden Style.* It was an astounding work-load and it took its toll. Mrs. Dohnányi (who was with him in the studios every day) was later to observe that it had made Dohnányi so ill that he had returned home in a state of collapse.[2]

The Dohnányis had no time to linger in London. They had to return to Tallahassee in time for Dohnányi to commence his teaching duties at the Florida State University, whose Fall semester, which began in early October, was almost upon them. The return journey on the Queen Mary at least gave Dohnányi some time to rest and regain his energy. Despite the physical strain under which he had laboured, Dohnányi appears to have been pleased with his work for HMV, and he awaited the release of these records with impatience. He was both perplexed and disappointed at the long delays to which they were now subjected. Neither he nor Ilona could accept that these recordings, into which he had put so much of himself, had become casualties of the upheavals going on within the EMI organization. And neither could Andrew Schulhof, whose correspondence with HMV was to become increasingly strident.

The following run of letters, drawn from the EMI archives and published here for the first time, tells the story of a long drawn-out tussle that continued up to Dohnányi's death, and vexed his widow for several years after that. These letters answer a number of questions that Dohnányi aficionados have been asking for years: notably, why the solo piano LPs were never released in America and were

2 ■ The documents show that Dohnányi was paid a fee of 400 guineas for his solo work, and there was a delay in sending out the cheque. In a subsequent letter his agent Andrew Schulhof mentions 600 guineas (doc. no. 2). We conclude that the difference of 200 guineas represented the amount paid to Dohnányi for his two concertos as well. These were quite substantial fees in the 1950s.

quickly withdrawn in Britain, turning them almost overnight into collectors' items. The conspiracy theorists also have had a field-day, suspecting the anti-Dohnányi lobby in the States, which had earlier tried to block his concert career in New York and Boston, of wanting to keep his recordings off the market. The truth was simpler. It was a business decision, pure and simple.

*

Document no. 1

Inter-departmental memorandum from David Bicknell to Mr. Fowler, EMI.

TO: Mr. Fowler[3]
Abbey Road

16 August, 1956

RE: Ernst von Dohnányi

Dr. Ernst von Dohnányi, who is a distinguished musician who recorded for us before the war, is to make some solo records and then some concerto records for us starting on August 28th. To make certain that he likes the piano I am having him brought to the Studio at approximately 4 pm. on the 27th so that he can try the pianos prior to his recording on the following day.

I have asked him to enquire for Mrs. Stewart and I shall be obliged if you will see that he is suitably received and given facilities. He likes a piano with a light action.

J. D. Bicknell[4] [signed]

Document no. 2.

Letter from Andrew Schulhof to David Bicknell

Andrew Schulhof
113 West 57th Street
New York
October 10, 1956

Ernst von Dohnányi

We are now working for next season's bookings, and in this connection it would be very useful for us to know:

when do you intend to release the orchestra recording
— in England?
— in the USA?
— is RCA or Angel who will release it in the USA?

The same questions are for the two solo recordings.

I would be much obliged, if you could inform me, and [at] the same time let me know, when do you intend to send Dohnányi the 600 Guiness?[sic] (He can very well use it!)

With best wishes, to Miss Matthias, too, who will be the kind and always efficient person, to answer my letter, I am, as always,

Sincerely,

Andrew Schulhof [signed]

Schulhof's charming typographical error, which confuses Dohnányi's fee of 600 Guineas with the famous beer called "Guinness" ("Guinness is Good for You") would surely have appealed to Dohnányi's sense of humour, in the unlikely event that he ever saw this letter. A few months later Schulhof returned to the attack, and reminded Bicknell that Dohnányi would celebrate his eightieth birthday during the coming summer, a theme on which he harped in several letters. What better moment to release these LPs? It was the worst moment for Bicknell, however, who pointed out that record sales traditionally slump during the summer months.

3 ■ Mr. Fowler was Head of EMI Studios at this time.
4 ■ David Bicknell was Head of the Artists Department at EMI's Classical Department.

Document no. 3

Andrew Schulhof to David Bicknell

Andrew Schulhof
113 West 57th Street
New York

January 2, 1957

Dear David:
Paul Kletzki
I have not received any reply to my inquiry about Paul Kletzki's royalty statements in the USA, about which I wrote you in my letter of November 29th.
Ernst von Dohnányi Release
May I ask you to be kind enough to answer this many times repeated inquiry when and where will you release the Dohnányi records. You know that Maestro Dohnányi will be eighty [during] the coming year and he will appear with many orchestras in the U.S. I feel that an early release with proper publicity would have an excellent affect [sic] on sales.

With best wishes to both of you from both of us, I am
Very Sincerely
Andrew Schulhof [signed]
Happy New Year

Document no. 4

Letter from David Bicknell to Andrew Schulhof

11th January, 1957

Dear Andrew:
Dohnányi
I have your letter of 2nd January but unfortunately I cannot tell you when the Dohnányi records will be released in this country nor which Company will be distributing them in America. With all the reorganisation that is going on, I am afraid that some delays are inevitable but you can be quite sure that we are going ahead with all our plans, as quickly as possible, but many difficult problems still have to be solved.

With every good wish for the New Year,
Yours sincerely
J.D. Bicknell [signed]

Document no. 5

Letter from Andrew Schulhof to David Bicknell

February 8, 1957

Dear David:
Ernst von Dohnányi

I would like to call your attention [to the fact] that on his next birthday, on July 27 1957, Maestro Dohnányi will be 80 years young.

I feel that maybe it would be a good opportunity to release his records—especially the one of the concerti which he himself has recorded for your company, and which is so widely known.

Looking forward to having some good news, I am, with best wishes from both of us,
Yours,
Andrew Schulhof [signed]

cc. Mrs. Dorle J. Soria[5], New York

Document no. 6

Letter from Andrew Schulhof to David Bicknell

March 21, 1957

Dear David:
For a long time we have had no correspondence and I tried not to "pester" you with royalty accountings—for Sir Thomas. (When I see you we will speak about all this in person.)

Today I want to send you for your information, a copy of the personal letter I have written to Victor Olof, also a copy of my letter to Mr. Chandler re the accounting [for] Kletzki,

Besides this, I want to again call your

5 ■ Dario and Dorle Soria had created Angel Records in 1953, in order to provide a North American outlet for EMI/Columbia.

attention—I hope this time very successfully—to the fact that

ERNST VON DOHNÁNYI

will be 80 years young on July 27, 1957.

Dohnányi has many appearances all over the country and the latest, just a week ago, was again in recital in Minneapolis where he was received with the same enthusiasm, praising his youthful spirit, unique musicianship, faultless technique, etc. etc.—as was noted everywhere—such as in Edinburgh and elsewhere.

You will be interested to know that Dohnányi will be the only participant in a great dinner affair at the Waldorf Astoria[6] in New York on April 3rd.

You will also be interested to know that Dohnányi's new composition, the Second Symphony for Orchestra, received rave reviews in its world premiere in Minneapolis, Dorati conducting.[7]

If I add to this brief resume that Dohnányi will appear with orchestras next season all over the country, then I give you a picture that I hope will induce you to release the records—at least the concerti—on his birthday. I just want to say one more thing—that I am very well aware that the answer will be that you have all three records already prepared and that my request or suggestion comes—as usual—late. If this is the answer, believe me I will be the happiest.

Hoping that you and Gioconda[8] are very well and that we will see both of you at the end of May in London, I am, with kindest regards to you both from both of us, as always,

Sincerely,

Andrew Schulhof [signed]

c.c. to Mrs. Dorle J. Soria

Schulhof displays some puckish humour in his reference to "all three records already prepared". It was meant to mask a deeper concern: that the records were not ready at all. And such turned out to be the case, as the following letter from Bicknell makes clear.

Document no. 7

From David Bicknell to Andrew Schulhof

March 28, 1957

Dear Andrew:

I acknowledge receipt of your letter of March 21st. At the moment we have Dohnányi's 2nd Piano Concerto scheduled for issue in October. We do not issue classical records during the holiday months of July and August but keep them for the better selling Autumn months.

I am glad to know that Dohnányi remains so active but don't let him overdo it!

Your Sincerely,

J. D. Bicknell [signed]

Schulhof was not satisfied with this reply, even though it contained the good news that the Second Piano Concerto would be released later that year. What of the "Nursery" Variations, and above all the solo piano works? he asked.

Document no. 8

Letter from Andrew Schulhof to David Bicknell

April 9, 1957

Dear David:

RE: Ernst von Dohnányi

Thank you very much for your letter of March 28th, informing me about the in-

6 ■ This "dinner affair" appears to have been a fund-raising concert in benefit of Hungarians who had escaped to the West after the 1956 Revolution a few months earlier.

7 ■ Here Schulhof was mistaken. The world premiere of Dohnányi's Symphony no. 2, in E major was given in London in 1948 under Norman del Mar. Incidentally, it is not always remembered that Antal Dorati, who conducted the American premiere, was related to Dohnányi. His mother was the sister of Dohnányi's first wife, Elsa Kunwald.

8 ■ The violinist Gioconda da Vito was Bicknell's wife.

tended Dohnányi release in October. However, I would appreciate more specific information whether you want to release only the Second Piano Concerto at the time or whether the record will also contain his other concerto, the "Nursery Tunes" which latter is so rightly famous, as it has three releases on LP, but none by Dohnányi. (Capitol just released this concerto here.)

I would also appreciate it if you would let me know where and when you intend to release the solo piano works by Dohnányi. I have sent today to Mr. Soria pictures and drawings of Dohnányi. Maybe you can use them for the cover. The drawing is especially fine, and was done by Ernő Koch, a Hungarian artist, who is at present in Chicago and, if your art department likes it, we can obtain his permission to use it.

Looking forward to hearing from you—and to see you at the end of May, I am, with best wishes and kindest regards from both of us to both of you,

Sincerely,
Andrew Schulhof [signed]

J.D. Bicknell, Esq.
Electrical and Musical Industries Ltd.
Blyth Road
Hayes
Middlesex
England

Within a week Schulhof had received the answer for which both he and Dohnányi had been waiting: the Concerto and the "Nursery" Variations would be released within six months. For the solo recordings, however, the news was not so positive.

Document no. 9

To Andrew Schulhof from David Bicknell

April 16, 1957

Dear Andrew:
Dohnányi

The Dohnányi record which is to be released in October will contain both the Piano Concerto and the Variations on a Nursery Theme. So far we have not scheduled the solo record.

I note that you have sent Mr. Soria pictures and drawings of Dohnányi which might be used for a record cover and if we are in need of any material we will contact him.

I expect to be in New York during the second week in May.

Yours sincerely
J.D. Bicknell [signed]

Evidently Bicknell and Schulhof did meet in New York during the summer of 1957, because the ever persistent Schulhof took the opportunity of raising the possibility of Dohnányi being invited to record some of the standard classical repertory for solo piano, despite the fact that the composer's 1956 solo recordings were still not released, and were becoming the object of some tension between the two men.

Document no. 10

Andrew Schulhof to David Bicknell

September 18, 1957

Dear David:
Dohnányi

Since your good letter of April 16th I haven't heard from you; we missed you both in Italy too. Please let me know when you have scheduled the solo record.

I am happy that according to the plans the two concerti are coming out now—unfortunately the very popular Variations has been released in the meantime by many other companies, but I am confident that Dohnányi's superb recordings will receive special attention by public and press.

You remember when you were in New York we discussed briefly the idea of Dohnányi recording solo piano works where he is still one of the greatest masters and widely acknowledged, respected and admired—and which he could do

either at the University of Tallahassee—where they have excellent facilities—or he could do it in New York. What do you think about the idea? Please let me know.

With best wishes from both of us to you both.

Sincerely
Andrew Schulhof [signed]

A considerable time now elapsed. Nothing came of Schulhof's idea of Dohnányi recording some classical repertory. He must in any case have realised that the suggestion would have fallen on deaf ears. It is nonetheless intriguing to think of what Dohnányi might have been able to do if he had been allowed to record some of the Beethoven sonatas in Tallahassee's Opperman Auditorium, where he had given so many recitals and felt completely at home. In the event, this project was taken up within 18 months by the Everest label, with fateful consequences.

Document no. 11

Leo Kepler to Peter Andry

Mr. Peter Andry[9]
E.M.I. International
3, Abbey Road
St. John's Wood
London, NW8
England

July 22, 1958

Dear Peter:

I have just returned from my trip to the West Coast and Canada to find your letter about Dohnányi, which was received here the 6th.[10]

Schulhof has been insisting for over a year that we release a Dohnányi record, and I have consistently refused because of the very poor sales of Dohnányi's splendid record of the Variations/Concerto, as well as the fact that there is an almost non-existent market now for lesser-known piano solos, even if the music happens to be—as in the present case—exceedingly lovely. I really don't see how we could justify, financially, the release of this record. I am quite sure we wouldn't sell more than 1,000 copies, which, of course, wouldn't even pay for covers and liners.

So, Peter, I'm afraid that at the present time there's nothing that we can do to accommodate Mr. Schulhof, who is certainly the most persistent man in the business, or Mr. Dohnányi, in connection with the solo record.

Best regards,
Leo Kepler[11] [signed]

cc. Messrs. Bicknell
Scott-Dunn

Kepler's letter was final, and represented the official position taken by Angel Records. They would not release Dohnányi's solo recordings for fear of a poor commercial return. It appears that among the arguments mustered by Kepler in defence of his decision was the fact that only the mono, and not the stereo recordings, were completed, a reversal of the original position taken at EMI. It was now the monaural recordings which were likely to lose money—such was the speed at which stereo sound had overwhelmed the American market. Dohnányi was now in his eighty-third year; he had made his recordings in

9 ■ Peter Andry had been Dohnányi's studio producer for the solo piano sessions. He became Bicknell's second-in-command at EMI, and would eventually take over from Bicknell.
10 ■ Andry's letter is not in the EMI files.
11 ■ Leo Kepler was now in charge at Angel Records, following the resignations of the Sorias.

good faith nearly three-and-a-half years earlier. That Kepler's decision represented a huge blow for him cannot be doubted, as the subsequent correspondence proves. One bright spot in this otherwise difficult situation occurred later that summer of 1958 when EMI took the unilateral step of releasing the solo records in Britain, with no hope of sales in America, and the prospect of a financial loss at home. It was at this point that Dohnányi himself stepped in, and wrote an appeal directly to Bicknell himself. His ire and indignation are everywhere to be seen. Dohnányi spoke excellent English, with some charming infractions. His letter is reproduced as he himself wrote it.

Document no. 12

Letter from Dohnányi to Bicknell

Ernst von Dohnányi
568 Beverly Court
Tallahassee
Florida

December 4, 1959

Dear Mr. Bicknell:

When we made our agreement dated August 29, 1956, in London, and I recorded, according to this, for two LP records my compositions, it was done in good faith and with the definite understanding that the recordings would be available to the public by the latest means of recording. I listened not only to the monaural playbacks, but also mostly to the Stereo—if we had time—and I worked extremely hard during this period in order to finish the recordings, and I did not ask—as is customary—any reimbursement for at least part of my fare and for my living expenses while in London for this purpose.

I did all this in order to make on my side too, all the possible contribution toward the success of these records, and I must confess, in all modesty, that I was very pleased, without reservation, with all the takes that were approved.

You can imagine my great disappointment when I learned that my solo records won't be released at all in the USA. It was artistically as well as financially, a heavy blow to me, and I asked my friends and manager, Andrew Schulhof, to do his best to find out why this happened.

Mr. Schulhof tried to pacify me and informed me that when he went to Europe in June of 1959 he would discuss the matter on the spot. Then I heard that the reason for not releasing my compositions, which I did on two LP records, was that only part of it was taken on Stereo. This was a very unpleasant surprise again. But on the other hand, I learned that one record—which you released on ALP 1553, with the exception of the short work "Pavane with Variations from Opus 17" was available on Stereo, and I learned also that your Mr. Andry repeatedly wrote to Mr. Kepler of Capitol Records to release at least this one record on LP.

I want to recall to you again that I sent in repeatedly—through Mr. Schulhof, of course—definite orders for large quantities of records on monaural of my solo works, from the USA; also that I reported that in all universities where I am appearing as visiting professor—as well as here in Tallahassee—there is great demand for my solo records.

We know that there still are a great many people who are buying monaural records, and if my works would have been released, as expected, at least at the same time here in the USA as they were in England, we would have had very good sales results.

I must urge you for the last time to do something effective immediately and urgently, so that my solo records should be released on monaural here in the USA and that at least the one which is available in stereo, should be released here too.

I see this as a flagrant violation of the contract which hurts me not only finan-

cially, but enormously as a musician and composer, and has already caused me very serious damage.

Looking forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience—and I would appreciate it if at the same time you would send a copy of your answer to Mr. Schulhof in New York, as well—I am

Very sincerely yours,
Ernst von Dohnányi [signed]

J.D. Bicknell, Esq
The Gramophone Company, Ltd.
Hayes,
Middlesex
England

cc. Leo Kepler, Esq
Andrew Schulhof, Esq.

Dohnányi's letter created ripples on both sides of the Atlantic, and within a few days it had elicited a firm response from Leo Kepler, head of Angel Records in the States. Although Kepler's letter is courteous enough, the relentless pressure under which Andrew Schulhof was placing him, reveals itself in his condescending sentence, "a few requests...in a college town [Tallahassee] do not signify a spontaneous demand for the disc." He wrote to David Bicknell as follows:

Document no. 13

Letter from David Bicknell from Leo Kepler

Leo Kepler
Angel Records
1730 Broadway
New York 19
NY

December 14, 1959

Dear David:

Ernst von Dohnányi

I have patiently and endlessly explained to Schulhof that a few requests for Dohnányi's solo monaural records in a college town do not signify a spontaneous demand for the disc.

I have assured him that we gave serious and careful consideration to the problem of Dohnányi's records, but that sales of the Concerto-Variations record were modest and that there was no reason to presume that the solo record could sell nearly as well.

I must have told Schulhof at least three times in the last year that we could not release the record, but he has refused to take no for an answer, and now has Dohnányi write his letter to you of December 4. I will not go into the entire subject of my conversations and correspondence with Schulhof, but will only say that he has been given ample and courteous attention. Moreover, I have made a serious effort to explain our position. He consistently refuses, however, to admit that our estimation of the commercial possibilities is accurate. Nevertheless, I shall continue to try to acquaint him with our plans and the reasons therefore.

Cordially,
Leo Kepler [signed]

cc. V. Olof
F.M. Scott

David Bicknell had also been stirred by Dohnányi's letter, and particularly that part of it which touched on the contractual side of their arrangement. Dohnányi's phrase, "a flagrant violation of the contract", now prompted Bicknell to ask one, C.R. Cobbett, in EMI's legal department, to examine Dohnányi's contract and let him know if Dohnányi's claims were justified.

Document no. 14

Internal Memorandum to Mr. J. D. Bicknell

22 December, 1959

Re: Ernst von Dohnányi

I have read Dohnányi's letter and it is quite clear that there is nothing in his com-

plaints which in any way constitute a breach of our contract with the Artist.

The recordings he mentions are subject to the terms of the letter of Agreement of the 30th December 1955, and his attention could be drawn to Clause 7 of that Agreement which is our usual Clause giving us the right "at our sole discretion to commence or discontinue the production, reproduction, sale, use, and performance" of the contract records.

I return your papers herewith.

C.R. Cobbett
Legal Department

cc. V. Olof
F.M. Scott

Armed with this legal advice, Bicknell now replied directly to Dohnányi. He pointed out that Dohnányi's records held out little hope of a good commercial return, that all decisions regarding American distribution were now made in America, and that EMI had in any case a very large reserve of recordings whose release had a greater priority.

Document no. 15

Letter from Bicknell to Dohnányi

Mr. Ernst von Dohnányi
568 Beverly Court
Tallahassee
Florida

30 December, 1959

Dear Dr. Dohnányi:

I appreciate your disappointment in the fact that your solo records are not available in the U.S.A. The facts of the matter are that there has never been any attempt at dictating policy from London and soon after your records were made there was a complete change of management in the U.S.A. and this management is left perfectly free to select which records they believe will bring the best commercial returns. Unfortunately they have come to the conclusion that at the present time, when they are heavily engaged with the change-over from mono to stereo, that although your records were recorded in stereo there is still a considerable reserve which has greater precedence.

Frankly I am surprised that you should claim that this recording involved you in considerable extra expense because in fact I would have expected that the 400 guineas advance paid by this Company would be regarded by you as a useful contribution to the expenses which would have been incurred by you in any case in the circumstances.

In case my memory had misled me I have re-read the correspondence which was exchanged with Mr. Schulhof at the time and I find that the recording was only arranged after the Company had been specifically informed by Mr. Schulhof that your visit to Europe had definitely been decided and that you would be available between July 15th and October 15th 1956.

Yours sincerely,
J.D. Bicknell

cc. Mr. Leo Kepler

When this letter was written, Dohnányi had less than six weeks to live. He had meanwhile arranged to record some late Beethoven pieces for the Everest label in New York, sessions which were almost certainly planned as a result of the rejection of this same repertoire offered to HMV by Schulhof a few months earlier. Dohnányi set out from Tallahassee in the company of his wife, only to be greeted by the subfreezing temperatures of Manhattan in early February. We are told that the studios were not properly heated, Dohnányi developed pneumonia, but nonetheless he carried on with the recording sessions. Under the most trying conditions he committed to

disc the "Diabelli" Variations and the E major Sonata, op. 109. He also went on to record a number of his own pieces, including some of the most demanding: the Etudes in B flat major and E major, and the Rhapsody in F sharp minor. This was a heavy load for an 83-year old. He was taken ill in the middle of one of the recording sessions, developed a high fever and was taken to the Madison Avenue Hospital in Manhattan where he suffered a fatal heart attack and died on February 9, 1960. His body was brought back to Tallahassee where he was buried in the city's Roselawn Cemetery.

Ilona was devastated by Dohnányi's death, and she would remain a grieving widow for the rest of her long life. She devoted herself to perpetuating the memory of her famous husband, writing books about him, and generally caring for his legacy. It was not until a year or more after his demise that Ilona summoned up the energy to return to the topic of Dohnányi's EMI recordings. Evidently she felt as strongly about the matter as had Dohnányi himself. Ilona was a linguist, with a knowledge of at least five languages, of which English was the third or fourth, and which, despite her years in America was still not the most secure. The text of her letter to David Bicknell is published as she herself wrote it, including her endearing transgressions of style. It is probably safe to say that in the many years that Bicknell had been dealing with artists and their survivors, he could rarely have received such a letter as this one. History does not record how he felt about receiving a missive written "in the name of all music lovers" and about being included for possible identification as one who wished to "silence" Dohnányi's music.

Document no. 16

David J. Bicknell, Esq
E.M.I. Gramaphone [sic] Co.,
Blyth Road
Hayes
Middlesex
England

March 31, 1961

Dear Mr. Bicknell:

I have just been informed that my husband's, Ernst von Dohnányi's three records which he made in England in 1956, one of which has been made with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, have been discontinued and taken off the Catalogue. I cannot tell you what a shock this was to me and to the whole music world in America as well as in England.

I understand perfectly well that it may be important for you to discontinue these records because of some business-reason, for unhappily it is business that rules this world. But may I remind you that there may be something which is, even in this troubled world, above all business. There is also an obligation to an artist, who on these records has performed his OWN compositions, in a way that could NEVER be equalled. Also, in making those records, at 78 years of age, he had undergone such fatigue and strain, that he returned home in a state of collapse—Mrs. Schulhof and others can witness to this.

I am not speaking as his wife, but on behalf of all those who love music—must the works of a great composer be silenced forever for business reason? I beseech you to reflect further on this matter. And I am sure you will not want to be responsible for such an act. Therefore I beg you to continue those records, the more so, because there is a great interest for them. For instance, in Austria, Dr. Heinrich Haerdtl, Director of AMADEO Gramaphon Company, Wien III. Konzerthaus, a great admirer of my hus-

band's music, would greatly be interested to represent these records in Europe, would you care to get in touch with him.

If you still refuse to agree to my request, I beg you at least to send these three records to the following addresses, charging the expense to me.

1. BAYERFUNK, Rundfunk, Münich, West Germany, Department of Musik.

2. RIAS, Rundfunk, Westberlin, West Germany

3. Radio Innsbruck, Tirol, Austria, Department of Musik.

Please name me as sender on each package, since I wish to make a donation to these radios, so that at least in such a way my husband's music should be heard instead of being silenced. I also ask you to send me one copy of these records, since I have given away my copies to friends. Hoping you will accede to my request which I am making to you in the name of all music lovers.

Sincerely,
Helen von Dohnányi
(Mrs. Ernst von Dohnányi) [signed]

Bicknell's reply was deft. Ilona herself had opened the door, so Bicknell obliged her and walked through it. The problem, he readily agreed with her, was not the quality of the performance but the prospect of poor business. With that he could not live.

Document no. 17

Letter from Bicknell to Ilona von Dohnányi

Mrs. Ernst von Dohnányi
568, Beverly Court
Tallahassee
Florida
U.S.A.

27th April, 1961

Dear Mrs. Dohnányi:
Please forgive me for not answering before your letter of March 31st but I have been abroad and have only just returned.

Believe me, I regret as much as you do that so many fine records, even unique records, have to be removed from our catalogue but as you say, business rules the world and it is not possible for a commercial company to keep on its catalogues, with all the expense that this involves, records which do not justify their position by a constant flow of sales. If we were to do so we should soon find ourselves in the bankruptcy court.

The three records you mention have already been deleted but I have managed to find one set which I am having sent to you. There are no other copies available so I cannot send them to the German Radio Stations.

Yours sincerely,
J.D. Bicknell

With that the matter was closed—almost. But time changes many things. Peter Andry had meanwhile become Director of the Classical Division at EMI. It will be recalled that he had been Dohnányi's producer in 1956, and he always appears to have been sympathetic towards Dohnányi. And after Mr. and Mrs. Soria had resigned from Angel Records, the Dohnányi performances of the Concerto and the "Nursery" Variations with Boult and the RPO had finally appeared on the Angel label (Angel 35538). Despite earlier predictions of a financial loss, this particular record sold well, and the good news eventually reached the indefatigable Ilona von Dohnányi, albeit ten years later. As Dohnányi's surviving heir, would she not be entitled to royalty payments? She wrote directly to Peter Andry.

Document no. 18

Peter Andry, Esq.,
Director of Classical Division
EMI
415 Grosvenor Place
London, S.W.1.,
England

February 25, 1971

Dear Mr. Andry:
I am turning to you with a great request.

I know you knew my Husband, Ernst von Dohnányi, and this gives me courage to ask you to be so kind and look into the matter of his records which he made in 1956, when we have been in England and when Mr. Andrew Schulhof has been his agent. I got your address now from Mrs. Belle Schulhof.

I do know that two Records have been discontinued, but the one, where he is performing with the Orchestra and Sir Adrian Boult his II. Piano Concerto and the Variations of a Nursery Song is still in existence and even on sale in the United States. Yet, except the advance, which was given to us while we were in England in 1956, we never received a penny from these records. Since I have to make my living from the royalties of my Husband, and am supporting my aged mother in addition, I would be in great need of this money. Please, be so very kind and look into this matter, why they never sent me even a cent of this Record at least? Surely it could not be that what my Husband received in advance should have been all that was given to him or to me?

I thank you in advance for your kind assistance.

Very sincerely,
Helen von Dohnányi

Mrs. Ernst von Dohnányi
586 Beverly Court
Tallahassee, Fla. 32301

Andry forwarded Mrs. Dohnányi's letter to the EMI's legal department, together with certain letters of agreement that Dohnányi had signed with HMV going back to 1948.

Document no. 19

Mr. G. R. T. Smyth
Legal Department
Manchester Square

Re: Ernst von Dohnányi (dec'd)

Attached is a copy of a letter, dated 25th February, which Mr. Andry has received from the above artiste's widow. Since the death of this artiste royalties have been held pending evidence as to who is the legal heir. The sum held to date is £348.12. Copies of the relative letters of agreement are attached as under:

13th January, 1948
30th December, 1955
29th August, 1956

Would you please take over the matter and let Mr. Mothersole know in due course whether the accrued royalties can be paid to Mrs. von Dohnányi.

Gwen Mattias [signed]

cc. Mr. G. A. Mothersole
Miss D. Chapman

When Ilona von Dohnányi contacted Peter Andry, it had been with the simple intention of claiming royalties owing her. She had no idea that legal complications would now arise, and that the claim would be subjected to months of litigation. The solicitor acting for EMI wrote to Mrs. Dohnányi telling her, in effect, that the outstanding royalties could not be paid to her until she could produce documentary evidence proving that she was her husband's legal heir.

Document no. 20

Mrs. Ernst von Dohnányi
568 Beverly Court
Tallahassee
Florida 32301
U.S.A.

19th April, 1971

Dear Madam,
Your letter dated 25th February addressed to Mr. Andry has been passed to me for attention. We do indeed hold a sum of approximately £350 in respect of accrued royalties due to your late husband.

However, we are unable to pay this sum to you, as the legal heir, until we receive

some documentary evidence of this fact and the fact that your late husband's estate in England is cleared for Estate Duty purposes.

I suggest that you contact the lawyers who administered your late husband's estate and ask them to take the necessary steps to obtain clearance in this country as soon as possible.

Yours faithfully,
G.R.T. Smyth [signed]
Solicitor—Legal Department

The receipt of this letter must have caused Mrs. Dohnányi some turmoil, but she evidently took it to her Tallahassee lawyer, who replied to EMI in terms as ambiguous as the ones embodied within Mr. Smyth's original missive.

Document no. 21
Letter from Julian R. Alford to G.R.T. Smyth

Mr. G.R.T Smyth
Solicitor—Legal Department
EMI Limited
20 Manchester Square
London W1A 1ES

April 29, 1971

Dear Mr. Smyth:
Receipt is acknowledged of your letter of April 19, 1971, to Mrs. Dohnányi, a copy of the same which I attach for your reference.

This letter indicates that the money held for the Dohnányi estate cannot be paid until you receive documentary evidence of the legal heir and until steps are taken to obtain clearance from your country. Since I have no knowledge concerning the information you require, I would like to impose on you to ask for information or reference to some authority there whom I can deal with. Any reasonable fee or cost will be borne by Mrs. Dohnányi.

Thanking you for your early reply, I remain

Sincerely yours,
Julian R. Alford [signed]

Julian R. Alford
210 Office Plaza—Dial 877-4187
Tallahassee
Florida 32301

The file does not indicate how Mrs. Dohnányi proved to EMI that she was who she insisted she was. But within a few months the lawyers on both sides of the Atlantic had finally sorted everything out. In July 1971, Mrs. Dohnányi was promised a payment in the amount of £348.12. Finally, on October 18, 1971, she received a cheque for £367.82, from which a charge of £52.00 had been deducted to cover the fee for EMI's solicitors.

To this otherwise depressing story there has recently been attached a happy ending. In March 2004, the British record label APR secured a licence from EMI to release on two compact discs everything that Dohnányi had recorded for HMV of his own compositions since 1929, under the title "Dohnányi plays Dohnányi", including some previously unreleased discs. The original tapes have been copied, digitalized and restored with loving care by Bryan Crimp, Head of APR, who also used the previously unheard stereo tapes where they were available.[12] *The result is the best survey ever produced of the piano playing of one of the twentieth century's most musical pianists. These long-lost recordings are now available to us all, and prove the truth of the old adage, "Time turns everything into treasure."* ❧

12 ■ They are issued on APR 7038. I wish to express my thanks to Bryan Crimp for his help in preparing this article, and also to the officials at the EMI archives for permission to use the background documentation. A. W.

Zoltán Kocsis

Dohnányi Plays Dohnányi

Dohnányi plays Dohnányi. The Complete HMV Solo Piano Recordings 1929–1956. Appian Publications & Recordings APR 7038.

The Romantics cannot be condemned »en bloc«
Béla Bartók

If we were to characterise Ernst von Dohnányi's art in a single word, then the first choice would have to be *largesse,* with all the positive and negative connotations of the word. We cannot assess Dohnányi or value him artistically from any other standpoint. His musicianship sweeps away any approach that is petty, clever-clever, or over-analytical. This is even more true of his playing, which in its preserved form contains original features which we seek in vain in the written scores. While listening many times to the music on these two CDs, multiple questions arise, the great majority of which relate in fact to his whole career—seen by many as lacking direction, incomplete and full of lost opportunities. The most important question will probably remain forever unanswered: why was he incapable of renewal, why did he not let himself be swept along by the fresh breezes blowing at the beginning of the century, when he was only four years older than Bartók? How could such a talented phenomenon, a born citizen of the world, remain in a certain sense so provincial? Laziness? Conformity? A taste for officialdom? Perhaps a bit of each. True, Dohnányi played an active role alongside Bartók and Kodály as a member of the Music Directorate during the 1919 Budapest Soviet Republic, but by 1923 he already counted as a conservative in musical composition. Next to Bartók's *Dance Suite* and Kodály's *Psalmus Hungaricus,* Dohnányi's *Hungarian Festive Overture,* a masterly example of its type, made hardly an impression. In spite of his being with the leading European music publishers, it was Dohnányi the performer that attracted Europe's attention, while the composers were primarily Bartók and Kodály—as well as to some

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Zoltán Kocsis
a pianist, conductor and composer, has been Musical Director of the Hungarian National Philharmonic Orchestra since 1997. He co-founded the Budapest Festival Orchestra with Iván Fischer in 1983, with whom he won the Edison Prize for their 1987 recording of Bartók's piano concertos. A 1990 selection of Debussy's piano pieces won the Gramophone prize as well as the Instrumental Recording of the Year award.

extent Lajtha and Weiner. In these circumstances what could a conservative composer do—one who moreover was the first to play Bartók in the United States and who as a performer supported modern music not just out of fashion, but because he felt its significance deeply? At most he could preserve his stylistic integrity. But what if that style was at least as heterogeneous as the course of his life, his fragmented career, when both as man and artist he was being almost constantly harassed by the politics of the day?

But enough of this. The aim of this essay cannot at all be to assess Dohnányi's place in European musical history on the basis of an examination of his career. The contradictions in the life and artistic career of this great musician are only important insofar as they can be related to what we hear on the present recordings. Inevitably the question arises: why is the Dohnányi discography not far more extensive? Why did none of the big recording companies commission a musician of his calibre to record, say, the complete Beethoven sonatas and/or the main pieces in his repertoire? Why are his recordings so *ad hoc* in character, how is it that we can find no thread running through the path of his recorded output? Considering his significance as a conductor, why are there so few recordings where he conducts? Did perhaps Dohnányi himself not realise the importance of recordings, and at first treated the whole thing as a plaything? Quite impossible. By 1929 gramophones and 78 r.p.m records had in practice become a feature of middle class homes, even in "backwater" Hungary. A natural tendency to shrink from fixing the musical moment can only partly be the explanation, since for a composer the afterlife of his music is a more important consideration. The direction this afterlife will take can be determined for a long time via a good recording—in some cases for ever. Even in those cases where, as with Dohnányi, the improvisatory element so dominates that it almost contradicts what is written in the score. Let us be realistic—we have no other choice, listening to the authorised recordings of performer-composers—the basically Romantic approach did not mean that no models or fixed guidelines were followed. If we scrutinise the two recordings of the *Pastorale*—separated by a quarter of a century—then basically we hear, even if not completely identical, the same agogics and rubato in both. True, the later recording is less energetic, but such is natural for a musician approaching the end of his seventies. These are stereotypes we find not just in Dohnányi, but in varying measure in practically all romantically orientated pianists (Rosenthal, D'Albert, Pachmann, Friedheim, Sauer, Lhévinne etc.). There are exceptions—not surprisingly precisely those who first recognized the importance of recordings, and who from the outset made them 'for eternity' (Hofmann, Backhaus, Lamond, Rachmaninov[1]). They evolved a puritanical style deriving purely from the written notes, which in the field of performance in fact turned

1 ■ Which does not mean there were no overlaps: the repertoire of both Backhaus and Rachmaninov included music by Dohnányi. Interestingly Dohnányi—as far as we know—never played music by Rachmaninov.

much earlier against the Romantic style than it did among the composers of the time. Furthermore, they did it in the most syrupy Romantic pieces, the encore items of salon music. Dohnányi remains apart from them, just as he did not join any of the trends of the time as a composer: by 1920 his music had become irretrievably anachronistic. If we were to judge his output simply from a progressive standpoint, then he surely would not occupy an important place even in Hungarian musical history. Fortunately, with the passage of time such prejudices generally fade, and we are forced to recognise that lasting quality, conformity and value are not necessarily mutually exclusive. If we compare the compositional invention and skill of Bartók and Dohnányi at the beginning of the century, perhaps it is not too surprising that Bartók is not only the more awkward, but also much the less inventive. We might even hazard that within this style the situation would have remained unchanged.[2] Bartók's career and his struggles are well known: it would be illusory to think that Dohnányi felt for one minute that he might head the Hungarian avant-garde. His early years took shape too easily and smoothly for that.[3] From the start of his career it was clear that he would not change his style by swapping the ingredients that nourished it for others more risky. Not as a performer, either: his basic orientation remained the same to the end of his life. The differences between his earliest and latest recordings are only of a technical nature, the playing of the 83-year-old being understandably more slipshod, less accurate, less energetic, than the 52-year-old.

It must be said that there is a stark contrast between the comments of Dohnányi's contemporaries about his playing—full as they are of admiration and often glorifying the artist—and today's "objective" opinions of those who have heard the surviving recorded material. We must be honest and say that not a few of those who up till now had only heard legends about the phenomenal performer, when confronted with the reality experience disappointment. There is no reason to suppose that Dohnányi played very much differently, or was somewhat more motivated, in concert conditions—especially in his own music. He certainly was not the type of pianist who covered technical or other shortcomings with florid showmanship. Quite the opposite. On the evidence of his contemporaries—and not least of photographs taken in his concerts—he dispensed even with gestures. None of this should surprise us in one who was so "made of music"—he had no need of extra-musical devices, to employ them would have

2 ■ Bartók himself seems to have thought so: with one exception he never desired to perform his early works written in a national Hungarian style rooted in the German Romantic style. The exception is the Rhapsody Op.1 for piano and orchestra, which he was still playing in the thirties, the last occasion being under the baton of Dohnányi himself.

3 ■ The argument that this was the same for Richard Strauss does not go deep enough. Things were quite different in those years for Hungarians who were in search of the national tone of voice and for Germans wanting to develop an individual voice—and style—in the mainline development of German music.

embarrassed him. Yet even the greatest performers over the years develop mannerisms which are not so much the fruit of refinement, but crutches, bad habits, things to hang onto during work done in haste. If we add to this the fact that nothing stood further from Dohnányi's playing than an analytical spirit—indeed, what was there to analyse for him in his own music?—then we move further to the source of his mannerisms and understand more easily the perhaps excessive rubato, the hurried cadences, the snatched *strettos*—we could say 'too *stret-toed*'. It is not at all surprising that such excesses grew stronger with routine, best heard perhaps in the two recordings of his Op. 41. In the first, made less than a year after the work was finished, we hear a completely fresh, bold performance, full of motivation. We can sense clearly that it was carefully prepared, even that the pianist had been eagerly anticipating the moment. Hardly a decade later the second recording, though better in sound quality, is more muted, less energetic, with many more mistakes as though Dohnányi had lost interest in the work. On top of which the first excellent recording, for technical reasons, was never published. Such is typical of Dohnányi's whole career, or perhaps of all those who squander their talents. Nonetheless, those who criticise the pianist's recordings should realise how lucky we are that even crumbs from his art survive on record.[4] The suspicion arises that the managers of recording companies —in whose interests it lay to search out pianists whose technical perfection was not in doubt, who had stamina and were sellable—were as reluctant to display serious and sustained interest in Dohnányi's playing as he was to make any attempt to "become a specialist" in canned music.

Of this, we might say, there is no real need anyway, since the primary purpose of a recording is to preserve everything, down to the last vibration. Hence in practice it does not matter whether the recording is initiated by the inspiration of the moment or the thought of eternity. Whether it can be listened to repeatedly or not is a different consideration, but here time is needed for what is really good to emerge. We can suspect that none of this has to do with the sales figures of His Master's Voice LPs, which—according to the firm's representatives—were the main reason for withdrawing plans to issue the recordings in the States. Nothing could be more natural than that someone whose name was only met with once in a while by the wider public should not continue to work for long with a fundamentally profit-oriented firm whose desire was to cream off the immediate rewards. Even had he not been declared a war

4 ■ Those who see in Dohnányi the *non plus ultra* of the art of pianism probably think the situation unjust. But what was Dohnányi's own opinion? His first letter to complain about the issuing of recordings dates from 1956. We have every reason to believe that until then he felt all was in order concerning his recording career, and had no wish to sort out his various scattered records, at least he had no long-term plans concerning them. His priorities quite definitely favoured concert-giving far above the recording business, just as the great actors only took the theatre really seriously, considering films an amusement.

criminal,[5] the Dohnányi who was seen as representing the past and as having lived beyond the life of his own music would not have played an important role in the mainstream of European and American musical life.[6] Thus for the public the legend remains, while for the musician there was that hard reality for which without doubt not just external circumstances, but Dohnányi himself was to blame. His tragedy of being in a *cul de sac* of conformity at the human, political and musical levels could not have been a happy experience—and neither could the fact that the forties and fifies no longer spoke the words of Dohnányi's aesthetic creed. If we add to this that those other musicians who left a diminished, humiliated Hungary had also been through the same hell, then we can only marvel that those recordings where we can hear Dohnányi were made at all—and that we feel no sense of pity when we judge them[7].

For there is no need. With all its occasional lack of polish, its haphazardness, and mistakes, we have here the great school of piano playing. In the first bars it becomes clear that a universal musician is playing. In the most complicated passages we hear the composer, in the most pianistic passages the orchestrator, in the apparently most trivial phrases—without exaggeration—the poet. All of us can see that his al fresco approach covers up inaccuracies only to highlight the quintessence of the music. Even where the performance has shortcomings technically, we can sense his original pianism, which nearly all the time uses the ten fingers and radiates the inventiveness of a composer. It is beyond doubt that his composing itself stemmed from the piano and its capabilities, there is no trace of any kind of paper music, or the writing desk.[8] Creativity and performance are so linked together that somehow even the mistakes seem authentic—of course not always. Lack of regular practising is evident here and there, chiefly in richly polyphonic passages. And there are plenty of mannerisms: assessed strictly from the point of view of texture, the playing is far from immaculate. Yet even so we

5 ■ It is quite strange that Toscanini's disturbing and far from clear correspondence with Hitler—even if about Wagner—had less effect on public opinion than the ominous handshake captured on film which Dohnányi exchanged with the leader of the Hungarian Arrow Cross Party.

6 ■ Unfortunately Bartók himself may have fared no better had he lived longer. It would be an exaggeration to say that it was only a worldwide sense of guilt after his death that caused his sudden leap in popularity after the war—this was also due to real audience demand that extended far beyond just the avant-garde circles. It must not be forgotten, even so, that a very short time previously Bartók and his wife had earned only $300 for a full evening's recital. By comparison Jascha Heifetz's concert fee at that time was $9000.

7 ■ It was, to put it mildly, irresponsible of Everest to put on the market those recordings which Dohnányi virtually recorded entirely when terminally ill. These recordings of Beethoven and Dohnányi's own music were never authorized by the pianist, but of course, they earned a lot of prestige for the newly established firm.

8 ■ This is true also of his orchestral scores. The occasionally crowded writing in his *Symphonic Minutes* or *Festive Overture* clearly refers back to the richness of his piano textures, and makes it clear that Dohnányi right from the beginning thought orchestrally.

would rather hear Dohnányi's playing with its slips than the perfect playing of others "faithful to the score". Some of the recordings give the feeling at the beginning that he is approaching the instrument under the influence of a 'final intention'—these are the weakest moments of the set. When the inhibition produced by such discipline is broken through, then the spirit of the nineteenth century is conjured up for us—more precisely the Lisztian tradition of piano playing. Then we realise what artistic freedom really means, what the word inspiration refers to, how handicapped, to use Bartók's words, is our musical notation.[9] We can observe accurately that in this piano playing being careful, as such, does not exist, with a corresponding increase in the risk factor. Not one phrase ending is crystal clear on the *Tolle Gesellschaft* recording in *Winterreigen* (10 Bagatelles) Op. 13, even so the accelerated gesture reveals more of the composer's intention than a performance metrically more secure. For Dohnányi is proved to be right, even if the result is not one hundred per cent perfect.

But is there a performance possible that makes every succeeding attempt superfluous? Surely not. Bartók's thoughts on the subject of mechanical music also suggest that inferior performances and recordings also contribute to the afterlife of music—to the growth of tradition[10] (just as, in fact, do rehearsals and indeed practising, never mind the approach from the musicological side). Composers' recordings, even where they are inferior, give us indispensable information concerning the essential nature of a composition.[11] A typical example is Dohnányi's recording of his *Variations on a Hungarian Folksong,* Op.29. Even the theme itself is somewhat awkwardly played, as if the composer were reluctant to present himself to us with a musical form in which so many masterpieces had been composed before him. If we are really strict, we find here numerous faults unworthy of one of the greatest performers of the 20th century, lapses of pedalling, imperfect voice-leading, a lack of proportion, which when heard make us wonder why he left them uncorrected. But if we are not, if we can listen to the recording without expectations and prejudices, if we ignore the unsatisfactory aspects of the playing—if in a word we remember that physical dexterity can only decline with age—even then we are are given real aesthetic pleasure. The way Dohnányi, for the sake of unity, gives less importance to sections of the form which any other pianist would give thought to and "elaborate" more, the way he

9 ■ See Béla Bartók: "A gépzene". In: *Bartók Béla összegyűjtött írásai. I.* ed. by András Szőllősy, Budapest, Zeneműkiadó Vállalat, 1966, p. 733.

10 ■ "Therefore, even if one succeeded in perfectly preserving with a perfect process a composer's works according to his own idea at a given moment, it would not be advisable to listen to these compositions perpetually like that." Béla Bartók: "Mechanical Music". In Benjamin Suchoff (ed.): *Béla Bartók Essays*. London, 1976, pp. 298.

11 ■ For some reason an incredible tradition has grown up concerning Grieg's lyrical piece *"To Spring"* (Op. 43/6). In radical contrast to the original tempo marking—Allegro appassionato—celebrities play this short piece in an unendurably slow tempo, which in the composer's performance, badly recorded in 1903 (Dp G GC 35510 [2147 F]), gives a quite agitated, even hurried impression. An end could be brought to this situation, if pianists would simply take the trouble to listen to the recording...

subordinates the likelihood of achieving a crystal clear style for the sake of giving emphasis to a climax, the way he often plays chords, passagework and arpeggios in a haphazard 'casual' way to bring out the beauties of the harmony, the unceasing use of the pedal: indeed, these are all the heritage of the 19th century and the Lisztian piano style. And this heritage is so enormous, that it is perfectly suited to conveying adequately the cumbersome aspects of Brahms, with his puritan and dense pianistic style[12]. It would be a little extreme to apostrophise Dohnányi's music as a synthesis of the two styles that defined the turn of the century, but one thing is certain: in his playing his attachment to these musical idioms is continually present. Of course there is much more: his playing manages to be accentuated without ever losing for a moment its liquidity, the air of authority with which Dohnányi always approaches the piano and at the same time covers the whole rich range of its possibilities, and his phrasing never presents just a single perspective on the music[13]. These are not the signs of conformity, they are, in the Lisztian sense, an attitude that aims at devouring impressions and reworking them. Surely no other performer had command of so many styles as if they were his inborn musical idiom, while remaining so very recognizable through his own individual and unmistakable playing. It is all the more natural that a musician on this scale could not avoid certain failures, falling into traps of his own making (often, to be honest, with evident pleasure), though never overshooting the mark. The elegance that characterises this incredibly impulsive playing may be occasionally at the expense of control, but *ipso facto* it eliminates all superflous ceremony. "This is easy for me, I'm sorry I'm so much quicker at it than most others are"—is the message we receive on the surface. Fortunately, this is not the only layer it has and those who are willing to dig deeper, to make greater efforts to understand what is coming from deeper and deeper down, sooner or later come to see that Dohnányi does not want to move mountains, change worlds, invade souls, or even disturb them. He simply wants to make music, and it is just by this means that we are given an experience which is increasingly rare, which fewer and fewer people can perceive, and to miss which—whether because of preconceptions about 'progress above all' or other reasons—is quite simply a sorry state to be in. ❧

12 ■ Some sources say that Liszt had intended learning the Brahms B flat Piano Concerto, whose score was sent to him by the publisher. We have no information, however, concerning why eventually Liszt did not perform the masterpiece, which Brahms himself premièred, in Budapest.

13 ■ Striking evidence of this is the only surviving recording to feature Bartók and Dohnányi together, made in 1939. They are playing Liszt's *Concerto Pathétique* in a live concert on two pianos. Even though the musical texture of the music makes the two piano parts a gift for the players, the one romantic, the other more lean and expressionistic, nevertheless we could venture to say that Dohnányi without needing to adjust his playing could express the musical contrasts, thereby throwing into greater relief Bartók's uncompromising, puritanical style, which apportioned colour out only where required. Even so, what we hear is that even Bartók yields occasionally to the temptations of Romanticism—so that all told this performance, which in all likelihood was not much rehearsed beforehand, is really moving (Hungaroton HCD 12337).

Music-Making Begins with Articulation

Péter Eötvös in Conversation with Zoltán Farkas

Zoltán Farkas: *You're moving back to Hungary—that's very welcome news, but at the same time I was also surprised as this is a country musicians tend to move away from rather... What does this mean more specifically in terms of how you divide your time?*

Péter Eötvös: I would like to spend all those periods when I am composing in Budapest. If I'm conducting, I have to fly off to wherever the venue is in any case. In recent years, I have managed with great difficulty to set aside roughly six months in the year for composing. It's important that these periods should, as far as possible, be in single blocs because I need to empty my head completely when starting on a composition. All the information one accumulates in one's brain as a conductor is very detrimental to composition. It can sometimes take as long as three weeks before the material I have been conducting stops sounding in my head, and it's hard to wait until I am finally able to occupy myself with my own ideas. I don't know how others approach music composition—I suppose everyone has a different method or technique—but with me a plan is constantly winding round my head and accreting more and more bits of information. A composition only starts to assume definite shape when I lay it out directly on paper. I find I am unable to notate with a computer, because for me working with a pencil in itself manifests as sound; in other words, when a note is set down I hear it beforehand, and it will be as large as I hear it. One can see in the manuscript of his *Cantata profana* that Bartók simply writes a larger semitone on the horns. A manuscript contains much more information than a printed score about the relation between the graphical representation and the acoustic concept. That is why I prefer, whenever possible, to conduct from the manuscript.

Zoltán Farkas
is a music historian and music critic. He is a fellow at the Music Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, specialising in 18th-century liturgical music and contemporary Hungarian music.

What led you to move back to Hungary?

It's simply an emotional relation, a physical need; because the air and the sunlight are as they are here at home, because people speak Hungarian, because in Budapest one can go to the theatre, the cinema programmes are better than in a great many foreign cities, where one simply can't go to the cinema because all the films that are running are commercial. That is what Budapest means for me; the remaining six months consist of a constant whizzing about the world.

You have often said how important film music was for you in your younger days. I've been told by András Szőllőssy as well that this was the main refuge for composers during the Sixties and where they learned how to handle time and find expression. It provided a discipline and freedom whilst remaining totally unfettered by the normative pressures imposed by the official schools of training in composition. It is well known that you were not admitted to the conducting class in Budapest, you studied that in Cologne; however, you only started conducting later on, when, in your own words, you had, thank God, forgotten what you had learned. I think you are far from alone in acknowledging that life begins at the point where a person forgets his schooling; equally, with the International Eötvös Institute you have established a school of your own. Quite obviously, you can't be looking to direct a school that needs to be jettisoned as a matter of urgency for life. What sorts of activity are pursued at the Institute, and how successful is it in putting into practice the Senecan principle of "learning for life, not school"?

At the time I applied for the conducting class at the Academy of Music in Budapest, they were quite right not to accept me. I didn't have a clue about anything. By then I had gained my diploma in composition and had picked up lots of practical experience in orchestral recordings for film studios, but I became totally mixed up the moment I cued in the first violins in the first bar of Beethoven's First Symphony because they did not sound in the place I had been expecting. You see, in film studios the musicians are not seated as they are in a regular symphony orchestra but in the way that suits the microphone or where I want. The decision not to admit me to the conducting class in Budapest set in motion the snowball of going abroad because I could not continue my studies in Budapest, as a result of which one thing followed the other. The Institute was founded in 1992 specifically with the aim of offering the younger generation the sort of assistance and information that I did not receive at that age—either in Budapest or, for that matter, at the Cologne Hochschule für Musik. There one is, twenty-some years old, diploma in hand, and not the slightest idea what to do with it. Can one now knock on someone's door? Does a conductor need a manager? How can one make do without a manager? I went through all those steps.

So the Eötvös Institute came into being in order to pass on that kind of help and advice. Back in 1992, it looked as if it was going to be set up at Gödöllő.

Péter Eötvös was born in the Transylvanian town of Székelyudvarhely (Odorheiu Secuiesc in Romania) on January 2, 1944. At the age of 14, on Zoltán Kodály's recommendation, he was admitted to the Budapest Academy of Music to study composition. He received a degree in composition at the Budapest Academy and another in conducting at the Cologne Hochschule für Music. He composed the music for a number of theatrical productions and films when still a student. Between 1968 and 1976 he played in Karlheinz Stockhausen's ensemble; he also worked for the Electronic Music Studio of Westdeutscher Rundfunk from 1971 to 1979. In 1978, Pierre Boulez invited him to conduct the opening concert of the IRCAM in Paris; after this he was appointed to be musical director of the Ensemble InterContemporain (a post he held until 1991). He was Principal Guest Conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra between 1985 and 1988, and of the Budapest Festival Orchestra between 1992 and 1995. Between 1998 and 2001 he worked with the National Philharmonic Orchestra of Budapest in the same capacity. At present he is the Principal Conductor of Radio Hilversum (Holland) and the Principal Guest Conductor of both the SWR Symphony Orchestra of Stuttgart and the Symphony Orchestra of Gothenburg, specialising in the contemporary repertoire.

For a number of years beginning with 1985, he was in charge of the conductors' course at both the annual Bartók Seminary of Szombathely and the Festival Orchestra. In 1991 he founded the International Eötvös Institute for young conductors and composers. Between 1992 and 1998 he worked at the Hochschule für Music in Karlsruhe teaching conducting, a post he resumed in 2002. Between 1998 and 2001 he was a Professor at the Hochschule für Music in Cologne.

As a composer, a breakthrough came with an opera based on Chekhov's play, *Three Sisters;* following its triumphal premiere in Lyons in March 1998, it was performed on more than a hundred occasions in various opera houses in Europe. The compositions he wrote for orchestras and ensembles in the 1990s proved just as successful as his operas.

Z. F.

That was when they were starting to restore the royal chateau there: this has a wonderful riding hall, and we would have been able to use that. My plan was to assemble an orchestra of young musicians who had just finished their formal training and would be able to work with us for two or three years. In the meantime I would prepare them for auditions, because these are so hugely important in the career of instrumental musicians. Gödöllő would have been a marvellous site, but the timing and funding did not work out, so nothing came of the plan.

In 1994 I moved to the Netherlands on becoming chief conductor for the Radio Chamber Orchestra there, and from then on I ran a certain number of seminars and courses that were based there—though fewer and fewer, because I simply did not have the time. Some seminars were advertised as being run by my Institute but without my being present in person. People's response to that was that this was of no interest, because what they wanted was the chance of

making direct contact with me. Since then, we have managed to bring off certain shared projects with various festivals such as the one at Avignon. Two or three years ago, I went back to the Hochschule für Musik in Karlsuhe because they offered me a conducting class that I can run as I want. That's not to be sneezed at, because it's usually laid down what one has to teach as every school has its curriculum. I was given a completely free hand, however, not just regarding the contents of the course but also the methods I adopt for teaching the class. We agreed that only five or six students would be allowed to attend a semester, whilst the School covers their travel and accommodation expenses to enable the kids to come along with me on my full orchestral projects. They sit in for a whole week on the rehearsals; the mornings are spent with the orchestra, after lunch, until the evening, with the students. That has allowed a fantastic workrate to evolve, in part because they study the same programme as the one I take the orchestra through that day: they study it through me, because over the course of the rehearsals they are able to see how the interpretation is developed.

The afternoons start with them analysing the morning session. They tell me what I did badly and what well, after which we turn to their programme. What rounds this off is that middle-ranking orchestras in Germany offer plenty of opportunities for young conductors, so they are able to take various programmes to a full symphony orchestra at least twice a month. An orchestra will draw on the surrounding music schools, so all the apprentice conductors of three or four schools in effect get the chance to work continuously with a full symphony orchestra. That's the current model, and it seems to be very interesting and useful.

Are there any Hungarian participants at Eötvös Institute courses?

No, there aren't.

And in earlier years?

Right at the beginning, I worked with a group which included László Tihanyi, Zsolt Nagy and Gergely Vajda, among others. In fact, they emerged from the intellectual circle that characterised the initial phase, and each of them has since gone on to become a master in his own right.

How well have those who have completed the School held their own?

When I was still at Gödöllő I put on a year during which I worked regularly with the students and took them with me from there to two or three European orchestras outside Hungary. One of them, Kwame Ryan, later became director of the Freiburg Opera House; his contract there ended this year, and I see he is now conducting at the Bastille. His career is the one that has made the greatest strides. I follow them all, or rather they stay in touch with me. Indeed, one of my original goals was that classes and groups should be formed that will maintain permanent contacts with one another throughout life. One notices as time goes

by that groupings formed at music school can hold for life and be mutually very supportive. It is good to make a point of not allowing such friendships to lapse, because life later on becomes a competition for positions. One meets up with acquaintances in the most surprising places, and in terms of building a career there's no question that who you know or don't know can be a crucial factor. There's nothing to beat personal acquaintance. The young conductors who are working with me now in Karlsruhe have already been on visits to the Berlin and Munich Philharmonics, the BBC Symphony and other orchestras, which in itself gives them a chance to go back: "Oh yeah! You've been here before"—and that will still be true in thirty years. Keeping up contacts is one of the key aspects of working in groups.

You are seeking to bring on not just conductors but also orchestral musicians, and not of any ordinary standard either, but if you spot an attitude or bad habit that you don't like, then you devise some means—perhaps a specific piece—to correct that. What sort of frame of mind were you seeking to correct with your piece Steine, *or what are you aiming to train musicians in with* Triangel?

Ten to fifteen years ago, I composed several works for chamber ensemble or orchestra with a pedagogical aim. *Steine* was produced for Pierre Boulez's 60th birthday. The title is a play on words, since both "Pierre" and "Péter", or "Petrus", mean 'stone'—so, it might be translated as 'a stone for a stone'. The same distinguishing feature can be seen in Boulez's basic approach as in my own: a constant reciprocal link between teaching and practice as well as between composition and conducting. That is why we became close, simply because we have similar characters and stances to music-making.

In the first section of *Steine,* the conductor participates merely as a musician. He gives the musicians various tasks but then leaves them to sort out the possibilities for ensemble playing. Except for musicians who need to be seated (the cello or bass clarinet, for instance), the members of the orchestra stand. The piece starts, and the oboe, let's say, sets off, playing a rapid passage which is then passed on to someone else, who takes it over then in turn passes it on. So a link is created with a single gesture, and the musicians continue one another's gestures. Next there develops a game between two violinists. One of the basic problems violinists are confronted with is whether to bow with an upstroke or a downstroke: during orchestral rehearsals one is continually stopping to determine whether a passage should be sounded with the bows going up or down. I make a game out of that by having the two violinists stand facing one another, at some distance, then one bows downward on a note and the other has the job of playing the same in reverse, or in other words, with an upstroke. That requires the violinists to fight back their Pavlovian reflexes, because the moment one sees another bowing a downstroke, they automatically do the same. That has to be programmed in their brains, and it takes a while until they are able to switch over.

It's great fun for all: the audience can see what's going on, and the musicians also enjoy it because they are being posed difficult tasks. After that come various smaller or larger groups and imitations. One musician plays something, then the other repeats it, trying to play exactly the same, and this can be pushed to a point where the sample passes the limit of what can be registered. The idea came from a time when I was conducting *The Miraculous Mandarin* in Stuttgart, and I told the trombonist to listen to what the bassoon was playing. "The bassoon? I've never heard what the bassoon plays before. All I hear is the tuba, and that's it!" It turned out that this was not just a bit of joking but that musicians really do think that the conductor's job is to cue them, and they play what his hand dictates. The next section of *Steine,* therefore, consists of the bassoonist dictating to the trombonist: the trombone has to respond to three tones, depending on which ones he manages to hit. So if he hits the tone, then that's a good response; if he doesn't, then it's bad, and that's something everyone can hear. From the middle of the piece, the conductor all of a sudden takes over, and from then on a conducted section ensues.

I gave every musician two small pebbles from a stream to hold in their hands. The only instruction they were given about clicking the pebbles together was that when they were not playing and they heard a moment's silence they were to drop in a pebble click. So the relation between silence and sound is modulated in that way. There is no rest, strictly speaking: they are not idle when they are not playing but they have to hold the stones and drop in a click somewhere. That's the story behind *Steine*. I didn't compose it for a full orchestra but for an ensemble, because that sort of game is much more the natural territory of smaller ensembles, yet to my great surprise the Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra (SWR) also loved the piece, because it meant they could at last stand up and at last pay attention to one another, as a result of which a great working spirit developed.

To stay with your work as a conductor: you once called yourself a "test pilot" for new music, the one who tries pieces out for the first time. You admit that for you it is much more interesting—indeed, the only thing of true interest—to get new compositions to speak. Inevitably, that must mean you have encountered a lot of run-of-the-mill or distinctly poor works. True, you have also said that you learn a great deal from bad works too.

Certainly, one can learn a lot from mediocrity. If the instrumentation is poor, and one makes a note of what makes it poor, then that sticks in the mind as an abiding example of how not to do it. One can also learn a lot in formal terms, but in essence it's orchestration that is the most important domain. What I often come across, and for me it is a great surprise, is that I receive a huge number of scores that have no markings for articulation. In their scores, very many young and not-so-young composers are very precise about notating pitch and rhythm, and they manage somehow to orchestrate the material, but they give very few

dynamic markings and no indications at all of articulation. Two-thirds of the scores I get are of that category. I simply don't understand why they bother, because for me music-making begins with articulation. I regard articulation as supremely important, followed by rhythm then the dynamics, whereas I would say intonation is last—in other words, exactly the reverse of the general idea of music. I put articulation right to the top in working with apprentice conductors. We constantly work in a group simply because one learns much more like that. I let them criticize one another. I banish the piano totally from this game: it's banned in teaching conducting. Pianists are the worst partner a conductor can have, because they can generate effects that will never be heard in real life. On top of which, pianists don't react in the same way at all as orchestral musicians and, most important of all, they take away the conductor's own concept of the music. They extinguish it by playing a thing, so there is now no need to picture it for oneself, because one then has to do little more than beat the time and the separate lines will stay more or less in synchrony.

I don't banish other instruments; indeed, there are some I am very happy to use. It's always a great pleasure to work with a violinist or clarinettist. It's really important for a young conductor to work together with various instrumentalists (and not pianists), because that's how one learns how to react and give instructions. When the class is together they always sing whilst conducting. They are required to vocally articulate the music they are conducting, and that articulation has a specific vocabulary: there are certain vowels and consonants that articulate precisely what the music is saying, and what comes out from that is that there is no need for a passage to have intonation or melody. The primary thing is for the conductor to deliver the "text". Once that text is present, then one can automatically superimpose the rhythm, dynamics and the rest, and after that try to sing it clearly. It's from doing these exercises that it has emerged that this is the order, not the reverse.

Yesterday, here in Balatonföldvár, they projected the film that was made of the first performance of your opera, Le Balcon, *staged at Aix-en-Provence on 1 July 2002. In introducing this, you made a point of commenting how different the language of this work was from your previous operas. You claim not to know what your own style is, given that each work has to be tailored to its own language or style. At the same time, you are able to go back, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, to a work you wrote thirty years ago in order to correct it, or enrich it with some new idea. When you are doing that are you projecting your experiences with the idioms you have been using since then back onto the old piece, or is it the same idiom that you used then except you are now able to hone it by applying some extra technical insight you have gained?*

A bit of both. My attraction to film is probably prompted by the fact that it is possible to create *Balcon* musics of this type. For roughly the last ten years,

I have seen it as my task to shape sonic densities. In *Atlantis* I managed for the first time to achieve a new type of orchestration and create a completely new form of sound which avoids having the orchestra sound like an orchestra. What emerges is an acoustic density of a totally different order of magnitude. What sparked this off was, in fact, my experience of surround-sound cinema. I remember being completely transfixed the first time I sat in one. It was an incredible experience to have the sound flooding in on one at such an intensity from all sides. Ever since then, I have been trying to find techniques of achieving that same sonic density with relatively few musicians. There's nothing new in that, as Mahler at the turn of the last century was essentially searching for, and found, this same type of sound picture or technique. Except it's not possible for me to take a Mahlerian orchestration as a point of departure, because I need to evolve completely different sound pictures and styles for my own materials. When we were listening yesterday evening to the demonstration of the Budapest Music Center's sound equipment at MIDEM, it struck me that I was experiencing roughly the same sound density as I do when I'm conducting with an orchestra in front of me. For a conductor the quantity of sound, the experience of the sound mass, is different from that of the listeners in the concert hall. The sound spills over me at a much greater intensity because I am standing inside it.

Through microphone placing and using loudspeaker relays it becomes possible to achieve a sort of sound picture that hitherto has not been possible—close-up listening. Loudspeaker—and I am more than happy to invert that to a *Leisesprecher,* a soft-speaker. A *Leisesprecher* has the new function of allowing a microphone to be placed as close to the sound source as the musician playing it hears it. A violinist hears his or her own instrument quite differently from a listener in the hall. If, however, a microphone is placed close to where the violinist's ears are, then that acoustic experience can be relayed to the public via loudspeakers. They hear a sound that they have not previously been able to hear in a concert. In my next opera, *Angels in America,* which is going to be presented at Theatre du Châtelet in Paris, every singer and every musician will be given a microphone which is able to relay this sort of quiet, intimate sound to the audience.

Let me go back to your statement that it's not the composer who has a style but each and every work. Do composers, on the other hand, have a musical mother-tongue? Does a foreign listener discern some kind of Hungarian character in your music, and can you yourself identify any such distinguishing features?

One recognises French composers because they also speak French in their music. It's the same with the British. I recall that in Paris during the '80s and '90s we tried to devise programmes that were not structured in terms of nationality but followed specific themes. It turned out that it was very hard to do that, because even today compositions that stem from the same linguistic area are musically very uniform: it's possible to tell within really quite a short space of time where a piece

of music comes from. Of course, there are also some peculiar cases, like Toru Takemitsu, for example, whom on first hearing one might think was more French than anything else. Those are the exceptions, however. Right now, the tendency down to the present day is for the musical style to change from country to country, from one linguistic family to the next. As to what a foreigner perceives as being Hungarian in music—that's hard to tell. All I can say, once again, is that it lies above all in the articulation. When I conduct a piece by Bartók, I sing the articulation and stresses in certain passages for the benefit of the non-Hungarian musicians, after which they start playing in an entirely different manner. Not long ago, I conducted the *Divertimento* in Paris, and I had to sing right through it, note by note, to show what notes were stressed and which led where. The musicians were delighted to be learning a different way of articulating, because they don't get that from a lot of foreign conductors. All too often, they conduct Bartók in an alien fashion, because they don't understand, they are unfamiliar with his language. I reckon that I can discern a Hungarian quality of articulation in the music of Ligeti and Kurtág as well as in my own pieces. There's an affinity to Bartók, employing certain tonal intervals and formulae, certain cadences that, I might almost say, originate from Hungarian folk song. The influence of Hungarian folk songs, even in a rather elementary form, can become perceptible in a composition. No doubt foreigners hear this, because it is not characteristic of other composers.

There was time, before the succession of big orchestral works of the 1990s got under way, when you declared that you had not done any writing for orchestra because as a conductor you knew more about orchestras than you had "to say" as a composer in this medium. Had you tried and not succeeded, or did you know from the outset that it was not yet the right time for you even to try?

The first piece that I wrote for a larger ensemble, *Chinese Opera,* was composed in 1986 for the tenth anniversary of the Ensemble Intercontemporain. My task, as I saw it—it seems to have already been the main aspect even back then—was to draw a sound volume out of that group of 28 or 29 members that would match that of a full orchestra. There are various techniques for achieving that. One is a stereo seating arrangement: having the same forces split into right- and left-hand desks produces a greater sonic energy, because for the listeners the same number of instrumentalists play in a larger space. I was stimulated to do so whilst rehearsing a piece by Bernd Alois Zimmermann for the BBC. It is a work in which the musicians are spread out like on a chess board, but for practical reasons I tried the piece out with the BBC Symphony Orchestra by placing the four flutes next to one another so that they would maintain contact and each musician would know what the other was playing. Anyway, we tried the piece out with the classical seating, then during the break the orchestra was rearranged with the split seating, which was when I experienced at first hand what a fantastic difference the seating can make to the sound quality and volume.

A second technique that pertains to the sound energy or density, of course, is the use of overtones: the greater the number of related overtones that are clustered into a chord, the more powerful the effect. This was the first piece that, although written for a quasi-orchestral ensemble, had an orchestral concept behind it, and this has stood its ground well since then. After that, in 1992, I wrote a piece for full orchestra, *Pierre-Idyll,* which I played with the Frankfurt Radio Orchestra, and I took a great dislike to it. We played it through once, then I just closed the score and tossed it onto the scrap heap. That was one of those negative cases, one of the poorer pieces in the repertoire, by which I learned what not to do. After that came *Psychokosmos,* which offered the experience of what I call improvisational composition, and then I switched to a totally different approach. *Atlantis* was composed in 1994–95, and during those two years, in essence, I succeeded in hitting upon a technique that I feel works.

Towards the end of Judit Kele's film portrait, The Seventh Door, *you say that passion is an unknown quantity for you, because passion is something that carries people along with it, whereas you prefer to take your own things—control of your fate—in your own hands. Looking at it from the outside, I find the incredible single-mindedness with which you have been building your career almost scary. Haven't there been any downsides of that single-mindedness, or do you experience it quite differently?*

Quite differently. Throughout my career and my life my experience has been that certain situations present themselves which one either takes note of or fails to take note of. I haven't built my career, but at certain points I have plugged into a career structure and one step has led to another. That is not the same thing as building a career, because I'm not thinking that in five years time I need to be in such-and-such a position then doing what it takes to get there, introducing myself, making appearances all over. Rather... well, to give you a banal example, in 1977, when I was living in Germany, the Solingen Orchestra advertised for a new musical director. I went along to the auditions and ended up in second place; I didn't get the job. I thought to myself, fair enough, something else is sure to come up; until then I'll carry on with what I'm doing. Two weeks later I received a request to conduct the inaugural concert at IRCAM in Paris. I accepted. Boulez was present and sat through all three rehearsals, and after the third he invited me to become director. The only reason I'm telling you this is because if I had won the position at Solingen, what would that have meant? If I had been admitted to the conducting course at Budapest, what would have happened next? These are steps that one doesn't make consciously: one has to, or one can, accept life simply as it is. At any given moment, I have to decide which path to take, and from then on I proceed in the direction I have chosen. In my own experience, what is important is not to go back, and not to fret over having taken a particular step. Once I am already on a path, I should carry on all the way to the next turning.

It's not uncommon to speak of our culture being on its last legs, in specific cases that realisation, and an associated anguish or sadness, can also permeate a work. Atlantis *and* IMA *clearly demonstrate that you yourself have entertained thoughts of Apocalypse, the end of our civilisation—it is, in fact, the explicit subject of* Atlantis. *It seems to me nevertheless that you don't adopt a tragic attitude to being on the brink of a cataclysm. One strand of your œuvre reaches back to archaic strata of human culture, whilst at the same time—from* Kosmos *to* Atlantis *and* IMA*—they reflect a kind of fascination with science-fiction which has remained with you, virtually intact, since childhood. It could be that from a cosmic perspective, what is happening to our European culture really isn't such a tragedy. What are your thoughts?*

Whilst I was working on my opera *As I Crossed a Bridge of Dreams,* the text of which was written in AD 1008 by a poet who was lady-in-waiting to the empress at the Japanese imperial court, I felt it was as if it had been written today. Its emotional world, its idiom, the encounters—they're all so consonant with our current way of thinking and emotional world. Which suggests that cultures develop by setting off from some point, reach a peak, and then there is an inevitable decline. The peaks in the various great civilisations are equivalent. The reason why what Japanese culture attained a millennium ago sounds so familiar today is because our own cultural development is now at a roughly similar level. It was probably much the same in Egypt, and if Atlantis ever did exist, then its culture too could well have been similar. So, what is important about cultures is when they develop, when they reach their peak, and when they sink back somewhere. In that regard, one has to speak about cultures constantly vanishing, and in that respect the process is dramatic, but not tragic. Naturally, it is important to each of us individually which particular phase of a culture's development we happen to be born into. I, for one, would not care to be living in the Middle Ages, but I would gladly do so in the Renaissance: I could accept that intellectual climate for myself. I'm certain I would have enjoyed myself in ancient Greece, but I'm not so sure about Rome, whilst the era of Japan's rise would probably have been of interest...

Each and every one of us has to sample for ourselves, and make up our own minds, whether we can give a stimulus at this stage of culture, whether we can accept that stage or should seek another society in which to live. What is extraordinary about the way the world is structured today—though of course it may well also have been true of earlier ages—is that such a large diversity of cultural levels co-exist alongside one another. For us Atlantis represents the permanent hope that an ideal world once existed, and we should have the goal of achieving something along the lines of the high civilisation that Atlantis had. At the end of each movement of my work *Atlantis* the strings play music from Szék [Sic, Romania] in Transylvania—a region that to this day has preserved its traditional ethnic-Hungarian dress, customs and music. When Pál Schiffer made a documentary film

about Transylvania, back in 1992 or '93, it emerged that the young people there are no longer interested in their own culture. If they go out dancing, it is not to a traditional "dance house" but a discothèque, and the sort of tending of the culture that we know was still alive in Bartók's day has fallen away to the point that Transylvania's primary culture could vanish altogether within the next few decades—wrecked not under political pressure but through indifference. That is why this music from Szék is placed like a kind of refrain at the end of each movement: it too is one of the cultures that is threatened with extinction.

If one listens to the two works consecutively, it is obvious that IMA *is a continuation of* Atlantis, *both harmonically and in its treatment of sound masses. You have already hinted that there is a dramaturgical strand that leads from the artificial "underwater" chorus of* Atlantis *to the actual chorus of* IMA.

I composed *Atlantis* in 1994, but I was already starting to become occupied with the project back in 1966, because that was when I came across Sándor Weöres' poem *Néma zene* (Silent Music). This is laid out on the page in such a way that it presents a double poem—a poem within the poem—with parts of the text that are merged into the centre of each line yielding their own separate sense:

Sándor Weöres
Silent Music (extract*)

a psalm commences anew
unseen ***at land is*** *a pure world*
that ***has sunk*** *beneath the foam*
for the unruffled age of love ***they ear****nestly fought off recurrent night*
thus it bore ***its ank****ylosed, blinded egos,*
*the tribe has succumbed to co****wed ont****ologies*
*from the void of the dar****k now*** *cries out the...*

This was the section that drew me most, because I immediately somehow sensed that this kind of duality, the relation between the linear and the vertical readings, could also be replicated musically. I initially thought of a children's chorus and the text of the vertical reading, which runs *"Atlantis / has sunk / the year / it sank / we don't / know."* Then in the second movement that internal text was picked out, with a baritone singing the entire linear text and a child's voice, the vertical lines. At the very end of the poem Weöres graphically writes "whirlpool eddies... whirlpool eddies..." For me, back in '66, that whirlpool presented to me in such a way that I placed the high tones on top, the low ones down below, and I envisaged a set of movements swirling towards the centre. The only

* With the translator's apologies for failing to match precisely either the immaculate embedding or the sense of the original.

trouble was that it is very easy to formulate this in pictorial terms, but I couldn't devise a way of formulating it in time—indeed, I've still not solved it now. As a matter of fact, I worked away at the idea for some two decades until I finally set it to one side to tackle *Atlantis* from another angle. The text of *IMA* is the final section of this same poem, which is written in a very strange "ancient mumbo-jumbo" in which scraps of Sanskrit, Latin and various exotic and African languages are all mixed up. I was attracted to the archaic aspect of the idiom. The harmony is built up on an amazingly simple basic figure of juxtaposed pairs of fifths: one pair is, let's say, C–G and next to that is A flat–E flat, which is a minor second higher, so the two are directly related. If those tones are inverted in the order C–A flat–G–E flat, then two minor sixths emerge; in other words, the tones remain the same, but a different sort of tension arises. It was the interval between G and A flat that I was most interested in, so the dual function of that vibration is the basis of *IMA*.

It's of extraordinary interest to me that the core musical thinking of entire works by you can be traced back to just a few tones or intervals. I was astonished when you pointed out that the entire dramaturgy of Three Sisters *derives from a triad, a three-note figure—in other words, simple intervallic relations.*

Let me say one more thing about *Atlantis* in that context. Tradition had it that the first ten kings of Atlantis were five pairs of twin sons: their mother was Clito, their father Poseidon, and the eldest of the first pair of twins was Atlas. The first letter of Atlas, of course, is A and the last letter is Es—or E flat—and I made use of that as a symbol: in fact, the piece starts with an A and an E flat, and as it happens the same two letters also frame the word Atlantis. The first chord that the strings build, and the young boy sings, is a ten-note tritone row: there are five pairs of twins, so each one is represented by a tritone. What is interesting about this is that the numbers five and ten represented the foundation of the whole Atlantis numerology, which is why there are five flutes—in fact, five or ten of everything in the piece. Of course, symbols like that, which I feel are strong, only help me as a starting-point for a composition, providing a foothold by means of which one is able to set off in some direction.

Do you have any compositions planned?

I am working on two fronts. One is plans for operas, which I have to accomplish within terribly tight time constraints. There are plans that simply cannot be fitted into the available time, whereas there are others that are so major they just have to be brought to fruition. My first opera, *Three Sisters,* was produced for Lyons Opera, the second, *As I Crossed a Bridge of Dreams,* for the Donaueschingen Festival, the third, *Le Balcon,* for the Aix-en-Provence Festival. In November of this year *Angels in America* will be premiered at the Le Châtelet. I have already spent two or three years in negotiations over my next opera project, as prepar-

ing a work can take anything from six to ten years. That next one will again be for Lyons Opera and based on a Persian text: I am writing a one-acter from a short novel by an Afghan writer, who is now living in Paris. The one after that is being prepared for the Glyndebourne summer season, based on a Gabriel García Marquez short novel, *Of Love and Other Demons*. And there is yet another project, for the Munich Opera House in 2010. I don't know as yet what the subject of that will be, but they have asked me to make use of the house's big chorus.

The other series comprises mainly orchestral or concerto works. Since January I have been working on a solo piano piece for Pierre-Laurent Aimard to play with orchestra. Its feature is that every note struck on the piano will have an interval that is sounded simultaneously. The distance between the struck note and its associated note—it may be a fourth or a tone three octaves higher—will be controlled by another player, likewise on a keyboard. These "double" notes have essentially the same function as in colour-mixing: a new quality, a new kind of colour, emerges from merging two colours. All the parameters of the notes struck by the pianist will be transferred to the other tone, so in other words they will sound at exactly the same moment and with exactly the same energy. That is something no pianist could achieve with two hands. What this produces is a kind of colour-piano in which the interval determines the piano's colour. Technically it is not a difficult task, but from the compositional angle it is horrendously complicated because the entire range of possibilities is available, and I have to play my way through the entire scale to find out what the appropriate interval is. Of course, the technique doesn't apply just to a monodic line, so when a pianist is playing with all ten fingers, then twenty tones are being sounded, and those have to fit one another. Another of my plans is a violin concerto-like piece that is to be premiered at Lucerne in 2007–8: that will be a kind of Requiem in memory of the seven astronauts who were burned up on lift-off some years ago. Then I have yet another concerto-type project, one for two clarinettists—Sabine and Wolfgang Meyer—and string orchestra. Those are my plans for the next six years, then.

To finish off, I would revert to the fact that you are nevertheless going to be spending more time here, in Hungary, than before. What is running through my mind is a thought that the novelist and philosopher Béla Hamvas writes in Arlequin: *"One cannot sneak through life away from others. Indeed, the more intensively someone lives, the more accessible he makes that intensive life to others." I am delighted, therefore, that henceforth your very intensive life will be moving ahead closer to us.* ❧

Tamás Koltai

The Tale's the Thing

Ferenc Molnár: *A vörös malom* (The Red Mill) • László Németh: *Galileo* • Péter Kárpáti: *A negyedik kapu* (The Fourth Gate) • János Háy: *Senák*

The theatre often makes use of the fairy-tale, the simplest of stories, to convey a message. Sometimes the original quality of the tale is retained; sometimes it assumes a symbolic, metaphorical content. The Katona József Company of Kecskemét found and revived *The Red Mill,* a rarely performed piece by Ferenc Molnár. The great poet and novelist Dezső Kosztolányi described it as "a play with high pretensions", when it was first shown. Others, obviously reminded of Imre Madách's classic, *The Tragedy of Man,* called it a "dramatic poem". Molnár himself may have had *The Tragedy of Man* in mind too. Both plays have "the devil" as their main character. Madách's devil seeks to corrupt man in his various historical guises; the target of Molnár's devil is man as a moral being. In *The Tragedy of Man,* Lucifer attempts to rid the world of its illusions about ideals, Molnár's Magister aims at morals. In order to accomplish this, he invents an infernal machine, the mill of the title, which grinds down the last shred of goodness, honesty, decency (and all virtue in general) even in the best of men. The chosen character, János, or actually János János (the commonest of Hungarian male first names twice over) is a paragon of decency and honest poverty, a hero of hard work and a slave to family and hearth. The machine turns János János into a criminal, a slave to money, politics and women. He abandons his wife, turns crooked and, what may be worse, a member of parliament. Only a hallucination saves him from committing murder, but it also turns him back into his old self. Waking up from his bad dream, he gets his just reward, home-cooked cabbage rolls. Man is, after all, incorruptible. Molnár, the sentimental storyteller and moralist, is deeply moved.

Some literary historians later tried to show that this somewhat mechanistic play was, in fact, Expressionist. Very likely Molnár himself would have liked to see himself as a deep thinker. Kosztolányi, however, was closer to the mark when in 1923, following the premiere, he wrote that the play was "astonishingly superficial", "not Expressionist, only a fragmented, brilliant, Titanic piece of cabaret". The Kecskemét performance in no way sees the play as a piece of cabaret, quite the contrary: it eradicates even the last

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remnants of frivolity. The diabolical Magister and his assistants are white-gowned workers in a science fiction laboratory, passionless, indifferent and uniformly mad. The series of scenes in which they select the subject of their experiment—a grotesque parade of human failings—lacks any obvious irony. The story is presented by Tamás Juronics, the director, as an everyday Apocalypse with the action taking place in an underground train station. The "Head Evil" is picked out from the station's milling crowd. Juronics is a dance theatre man, a dancer and a choreographer himself, who knows how to move a crowd scene. He employs space with equal skill. The passengers, individualized as they are, are continuously flowing to and fro through the fast changing, impressively cold entrances and exits of the station (created by an all-glass-and-bars set). The extras perform the subsequent model situations with the same exemplary discipline. Juronics's first straight theatre production is a genuine surprise and highly skilful. He knows how to tell a story and his construction is well-proportioned. He has a good grasp of the situations, and he visibly does not leave his actors in the dark about what they are supposed to do.

The only problem is that the whole production is a little too dry and sterile, lacking in vital juices. One would expect the fairy-tale János János of the experiment to throw himself into life with greater abandon, naiveté and intoxication. Mira, the seductress, could be Sweet Depravity herself, an embodiment of the *ewig weibliche,* Molnár style. The diabolical Magister is like the director of a genetic engineering or human cloning laboratory in a B-movie thriller. The end of the play is not where Molnár originally ended it. The director adds a second ending: the underground station is blown up in a terrorist attack. Modern hell culminates in terrorism.

Can a historical parable about Galileo's renunciation of his teachings be regarded as a tale? Bertholt Brecht thought it could, at least as a tale with a moral or a caution. This play by the highly influential essayist, novelist, playwright and ideologist László Németh (1901–1975) is, for us Hungarians, a historical drama in a twofold sense. It was premiered in Budapest on 20 October 1956, three days before the outbreak of the Revolution. It could not be staged for a long time after the Revolution had been crushed. *Galileo* depicted the drama of the autonomous individual in an age when people who used their own minds were markedly disliked by the regime (what ruling power is actually fond of such people anyway?). The scientist-hero confronted the truth of faith with the truth of experience. That kind of thing was as abhorrent to the Church in the Middle Ages as it is to modern political powers. Independent thinking as a nonconformist life strategy is historically suspect and it is, as it always has been, something to be persecuted. For this reason the "tale" of Galileo will never lose its topicality.

In the 1960s and 70s we all started to feel that Németh's plays, with all due respect to their vast erudition and serious social and moral issues, were too static from a dramaturgical viewpoint, too stale, too dated. We were complaining that in Hungary this was a time when in other countries everything moved on the stage (not only the Earth), and the dialogue had become almost secondary to crude theatrical effects. Today, when we often feel completely fed up with kaleidoscopic circus type or Amusement Park-type theatre, Németh's majestically rolling, dialogue-based theatre seems astonishingly innovative, almost hypermodern. It appears as a "discussion" or at least an intensive mental experiment. It seems today as if

Németh's *Galileo* has caught some of the radiation of Brecht's *The Life of Galileo,* which is built on the dramaturgy of pure reason. If nothing else, the energy of the lonely intellect battling the world is definitely there.

At the Petőfi Theatre in Veszprém the play was directed by József Ruszt, widely regarded in Hungary as the high priest of ritual theatre but not as its dogmatist. Ruszt views every conflict both as a real-life event and a model. He places his Galileo at the centre of a sloping chessboard of black and white squares and surrounded by watchtower-like heights, from which every move he makes is closely watched by men in raincoats, security agents or spies. The armchair in the centre is the designated piece of the King (or spiritual leader) whose conquest means the end of the game. All around him, the "officer chessmen" (black, priestly figures) are drawing up in array for attack. The pawns (a Hungarian term for the piece is "peasant") or "the people" move forward in a line step by step, pushing small wooden stools. They wear blue workmen's overalls and berets. They also come from our times. The Middle Ages, as a contrast, are symbolised by a loving couple dressed in renaissance brocades, appearing at the beginning and at the end. They represent the idyll, whereas reality is equal with the skeletal austerity of the chess game. The production seems so geometric only when one attempts to describe it; at its most intense moments its ideas and emotions are overwhelming. At the very end, the projected stationary background of Zodiacal signs begins to turn around and swirl in a galactic manner, accompanied by Baroque music, while the bent figure of the main character is seen in silhouette. This is a veritable apotheosis: a little self-pity and an enormous amount of eulogy combined.

Péter Kárpáti's Chassidic tale has no story at all in the original sense of the term, as normally understood, that is a plot that can be reproduced in a narrative. Although *The Fourth Gate* covers the life of a young man from birth to death, it is not followed up according to the customary dramatic processes, by the stage techniques of the epic play, but reproduced in anecdotes which have survived as the religious legendary of a Jewish community, the Chassidim. These anecdotes are more closely related to the general beliefs of the community than to the individuals representing them. Consequently it would be an exaggeration to speak of individuals with characteristics of their own or of characters. It does not, however, follow that Kárpáti's dialogue, based on a novel by Jiři Langer, is not a drama (as it is often said even by admirers), even less that is unfit for being enacted on the stage (today, many texts never meant for the stage are being performed nonetheless), but only that staging it demands tougher decisions than usual. The previous production (the first one) was an intimate lyrical ritual play starting out from oral tale-telling, based upon the dialogue. The current production by Eszter Novák, director at the Jászai Mari Theatre in Tatabánya, is placed at an old monastery, which gives it an entirely different character.

The place suggests a sacral quality and poverty, both of which are fundamental elements of the world created by the dialogue. The designer employs simple props. One anecdote is about why, under Joseph II, son of Maria Theresa, the Holy Roman Emperor and King of Hungary, Jewish youths were exempt from military service. The holy wise men of Lizhensk are drinking coffee from a shared cup, and when the coffee is spilt, the spilling takes place at the very same moment when ink is spilt over the imperial patent on military

service, that is being readied for the Emperor's signature. This scene is enacted with the two spots of the "empire"—the emperor and the wise man of Lizhensk—being connected, instead of a table, by a long board (with the coffee and ink on top), which the actors balance on their knees. In another scene, demonstrating the wisdom of the Lord and the simple-mindedness of an illiterate holy man, a debate is going on, amidst a great deal of vodka-drinking, on whether redemption might not take place via human inventions (lightning-conductor, railway, telephone). This "heavenly" debate is performed by actors wobbling on chairs of an unlikely height, "reaching into the heavens", as it were, moving between multiple roles. Moving from one role to the next and stepping back out of it, represents a kind of theatrical routine, and it also serves to give us an insight via the stations of the anecdotes into the naively cheerful "religion of joy" of the Chassidim. The latter is more difficult, since it has to convey the daily life, customs and philosophy of a special world in a highly concentrated manner and, what is more, achieve this by using a verbal medium full of "untranslated" Yiddish and Hebrew words mixed with Russian, Ukrainian and Polish. The audience not only has to take in the fact that the soul, offered to the Lord, may, with the passing away of the individual, move into a common fruit, but also that the fruit in question happens to be called *esrog* (which is something similar to a lemon, but that piece of information is not accessible to viewers, only to readers of the dialogue).

The paradox of *The Fourth Gate* is that it has to turn the legends of Chassidism into a theatrical experience (it should be noted that theatre-going is looked upon by the Chassidim as a major vice) and into one that is valid also beyond the fundamental religious-folkloristic substance, telling something about the essential, "generic" qualities of man. The production has two planes. One is the subtle, empathic stage existence of the members of the community (the Chassidim and the actors), closely watching and interacting with one another; the other is the playful comedy-acting of the players entering into a variety of roles. The latter makes it clear that the role is not memorable, only the actors can be, and the greater their virtuosity, the more so. This gifted production is somewhere midway between an affectionate representation of a religious cult and theatrical attraction.

"A tale about the appropriated horses of a farmer, authority and justice, yet it is not Heinrich von Kleist's *Michael Kohlhaas*." That is how János Háy's *Senák* may be briefly summed up. The time in which the action is set is not exactly defined but can clearly be identified as the 1950s and 1960s, the period when something called the "consolidation of farm plots" was in process. The term, no longer familiar to the majority of people living today, was a euphemism for forcing people of the countryside into agricultural co-operatives. Peasants were not allowed to keep the plots alloted them during the Land Reform of 1945, but had to take them into "the common land". The Communist regime (at least in its darkest days) knew of no such thing as private property. Landowners had to turn into employees, members of the agricultural co-operative. "Where is the tale in all this?" one might ask. This is history and a sad part of it too. However, *Senák* is not a historical play, and probably for the same reason which makes what is portrayed in it history: because of the distance. Its basic experience is clearly collectivisation (in the same way as the Second World War is to Beckett's *Godot*) but only as a resonance of the

absurdity of reality. Háy's play is an "absurdising" drama. Why it is not really absurd in the original sense (for it is a branching off of the East European absurd) is because its social references are much more concrete. It could not have come into being without the reality of collectivisation, but it has to work also without information about it. When he decides to "join", the main character, Jani Rák (the tale's Everyman once again bears the name János, even if in its diminutive form) goes through a crisis drama when he turns over his land and his two horses, because failing to do so would make existence for himself and his family problematic, while his own vision of life tells him their existence would be made secure by the possession of that land and those horses. In the sphere of social injustice it is the drama of Michael Kohlhaas, rebelling because of his horses, and in the sphere of eternal existence it is the drama of the absurdity of an unfathomable, inexplicable, threatening world. Háy is Hungary's Harold Pinter. His plays (this is his third) are full of tragicomically nonsensical questions concerning quotidian life. He is not clowning; the world itself appears irredeemably idiotic when we question it. It is not his characters that are retarded but the conditions determining their lives. Anyone who wants to find the roots of Háy's plays in realism or thinks they are related to realistic works is wrong. They are at most *surnaturalistic*. His fundamentally dramatic dialogues also bring Pinter to mind in that they employ, in a highly concentrated form, the means of reduction, linguistic cliché and modulated repetition. If there is any need for "improvement", then it should be directed towards even greater concentration, a more radical distancing from single-planed, sometimes oversimplified, banality. More work on the abstract plane of the language, a stylising and raising of everyday platitudes is the path through which Háy's highly original dramatic art may reach a higher level.

Tamás Balikó, who directed the National Theatre's production doesn't fully see what Háy is getting at. He gave the title role, that of the envious, ill-willed, wily Senák, a servant to the communist agitators sent from the capital for which he is awarded Jani Rák's horses, to an actor who, by nature, brings the character of the jovial "funny man" on stage. That makes Senák a cunningly clever loudmouth only, and the Judas aspect, which might bring him too into a tragic conflict with himself, is entirely missed. The director seems unable to hit the right tone, insisting, as he does, on a realistic manner of acting instead of a more distanced, stylised and fragmented style. His best invention is the pair of twins who, bald, sad and robust, wearing military grey quilted jackets and caps with ear-flaps, play the horses. The director, however, is not up to bringing off their climactic scene. He glosses over the fatefully dramatic moment with a storm effect in which Senák is trampled to death by the horses. At that juncture the story turns symbolic, an example of fairy-tale justice, which could be lifted to metaphorical heights by theatrical fantasy—if it had worked. ❧

Erzsébet Bori

Coming up for Air

Antal Nimród: *Kontroll* (Control).

There is a story about Stalin that he once asked Zhdanov, his notorious hardline chief ideologist, how many films were made in the Soviet Union every year. Fifty, Zhdanov replied. And how many of these are good? Five, Zhdanov said. To which the *generalissimo* remarked, why don't they make just those five films then? Whether the story is apocryphal or not, that has also been a frequently asked question about film-making in Hungary ever since the sixties, before the appearance on the scene of the Budapest film school—why are Hungarian films bad? Do we need a Hungarian film industry at all if out of the fifty films made, only five turn out to be good?

With the exception of some masters who have shown unbelievable vitality and capacity for renewal, such as Miklós Jancsó and Károly Makk, the older generation of film-makers are now slowly fading out. The generation after them are still at work, though they only manage to make a film every three to five years. The younger film-makers have triumphantly moved into the area thus cleared, intent on self-expression or professionalism, or commercial success. Not all young luminaries want to experiment, create a visual revolution or renew the narrative and idiom of the film. To those going into action with the battle cry of the genre film, the director's film is a red rag (the term 'art film' has become taboo).

What is a Hungarian genre film then? We know that this kind of film can achieve major commercial success on the world's movie, video and DVD markets. It takes the approved formulae, familiar themes, idiom, conventional solutions and, let us admit, clichés of the genre film for wider audiences to understand and enjoy despite national, ethnic, sex, age and cultural differences. From time to time, however, the odd 'crazy' genius shows up as an exception that proves the rule. He bravely crosses borders, breaks rules, and builds a golden palace out of the odds and ends he picks out from the garbage of mainstream films. It is the rare case of box-office and critical success, when new rules are made, upon which the epigones can pounce, and everything comes full circle.

Making it to order as well as marketable—there is not enough money and infrastructure for that in Hungary. Given the costs

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is the regular film critic of this journal.

of a costume film, we cannot even process our own history; even the 1950s and 1960s have become too costly given the need for props and costumes of a bygone era. Working without a formula, however, is like jumping into the unknown. A Hungarian film-maker who is talented and lucky enough only has one option: to commit a major breach of the laws of the genre.

As I have already written, the feature film section of last year's annual Hungarian film festival was lamentable. What usually happens is that the films are released between two festivals; by the time they run out, the next festival is up and it all begins afresh. In 2003, however, a speck of dust got into the machinery. An unknown film was released in November, which attracted more viewers in a month than virtually the rest of them through the whole year. This was *Kontroll* (Control), Antal Nimród's first feature.

Nimród is not the only American-Hungarian to come here after 1989 to make films (ironically, he was born in Los Angeles), so did Gergely Fonyó and Péter Reich. He is, however, the most persevering of them. He first trained to be a cameraman, then switched over to directing. He also did some acting and lighting work and made commercials while he waited for his opening. The wait may have been long but was worthwhile. American background or not—*Control* is not a genre film, at least it is not purely that. It is a unique piece made up of elements of several film types. There is a long list of movies, of various genres or even crossover ones, whose influence is apparent, but it is certainly no formula piece. Nor does it take being born in America for a film-maker to know that a film is meant for an audience to watch: that is evident in Hungary too, just as is the fact that a film has to be financed.

Let us proceed to view the elements of the genre. It is not unknown in Hollywood to work 'on social commission'; from time to time they set about focusing on an occupation which is topical or in which there is a shortage, such as firemen, policemen, soldiers or teachers. *Control* has opted for an occupation that is of low prestige. The principal characters are ticket inspectors on the Budapest Metro; in fact, the whole film takes place in the Budapest Metro system. Or rather, that's where it was filmed, for the story-line moves away from the stark reality. The well-known stations are given numerical codes and the map of the metro system is pure poetry. It's the setting that is really the principal character, and it is a direct hit. Its elements are cheap, eventful and varied—bleak, frightening, mystical, picturesque and most importantly, metaphoric. Each station has its particular features, and cameraman Gyula Pados makes full use of them. Beyond the dominant imagery, there is a wealth of lifelike situations and conflicts to be found there; there is no idea too absurd to be tried. The underground can be turned into an allegory of hell or purgatory, God the Father could be placed in a driver's cabin, an owl be perched on the hand-rail, the scythe of the Grim Reaper flashed in a bend, and still the place retains its elemental, palpable, identifiable reality.

As in so many film stories, here too Good and Evil clash in the guise of bosses and employees, passengers and staff, and even rival teams of ticket inspectors. Bulcsú (played by Sándor Csányi), in his 20s, makes his rounds in the underground lines in a team of five, trying to catch fare dodgers. The management issues a special instruction to keep an eye on passengers and prevent the mysterious fatalities that have grown in number recently. Whether suicide by jumping under a train has be-

come fashionable, or whether a serial killer is at work is not certain. Naturally enough, people using the Metro come from all walks of life, nor is it surprising that the inspector team has its own odd guys—undesirable jobs are counter-selective. What is definitely suspicious is that Bulcsú refuses to come back up to the surface even after work. He walks around in the tunnels, sleeps in service areas or carriages; he knows the whole labyrinth inside out. A chance meeting sheds some light on his own past: he has left behind a successful yuppie career in order to go, literally, underground. This strengthens our sense of the Metro as a metaphor for the world. It is a symbol and expression of, and a suitable environment for, Bulcsú's complaint, be it depression, panic or even schizophrenia. Good and Evil fight out their battle for Bulcsú's soul, or perhaps in it.

Control has no plot. It is made up of loosely connected episodes—comic, grotesque and dramatic. Briskly cut, its episodes display many figures and are accompanied by original and inventive electronic music by a group called Neo. You don't have to particularly like this kind of music to sense how right it is here, what a positive role it plays in strengthening the structure of the film, creating its atmosphere and enhancing its mood. *Control* would earlier have been called a film on our general condition, today we call it a depiction of a state of affairs. What makes it most interesting, perhaps unwittingly, is its ambiguity. Its makers naturally meant it to be more than just a psycho-thriller or a comedy based on gags by and on ticket inspectors. Fortunately enough, they did not calculate all the parameters of the interpretation—in cases when we discover allegorical hints or unequivocal references, we usually feel it is awkward and stringy. *Control* is not meant to offer a philosophy, a vision of the world, and after a few slips in this direction, it always returns to its real track—spectacle and action.

A relationship to *Matrix* (Part 1) comes to mind, whose philosophizing is purely commonplace, still it cannot be said to lack ideas. These are, however, in the images, which convey a sense of being, one by and large the same as that found in many a published work. The majority of movie-goers do not read philosophical and socio-psychological works, but they live in the same world as the philosophers and recognise their own experience in a well-chosen, expressive image. This may well be the forte and the key to the success of *Control.* It is humorous and action-packed enough to arouse and maintain attention. It is also enigmatic enough to get one's imagination going. It is suitably perplexing. A great moment in popular culture is when a work like that comes up. It is called a cult film.

At the moment of writing this article, *Control* has been seen by more than 200,000—in a country with a population of ten million, just two months after its release. It has also won several awards and prizes abroad. ❧

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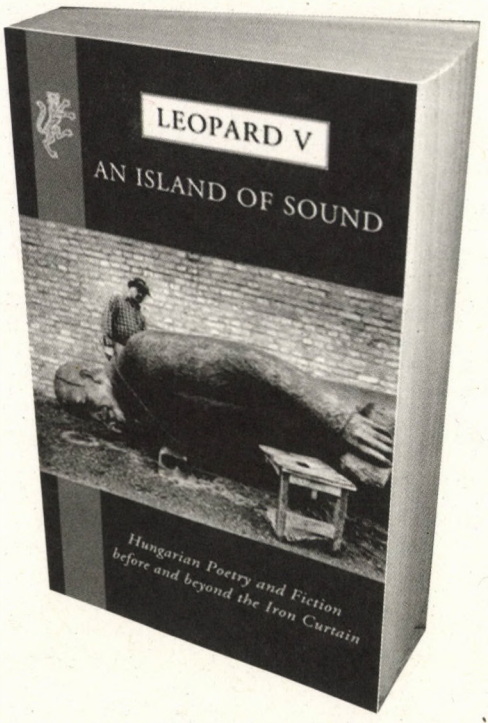

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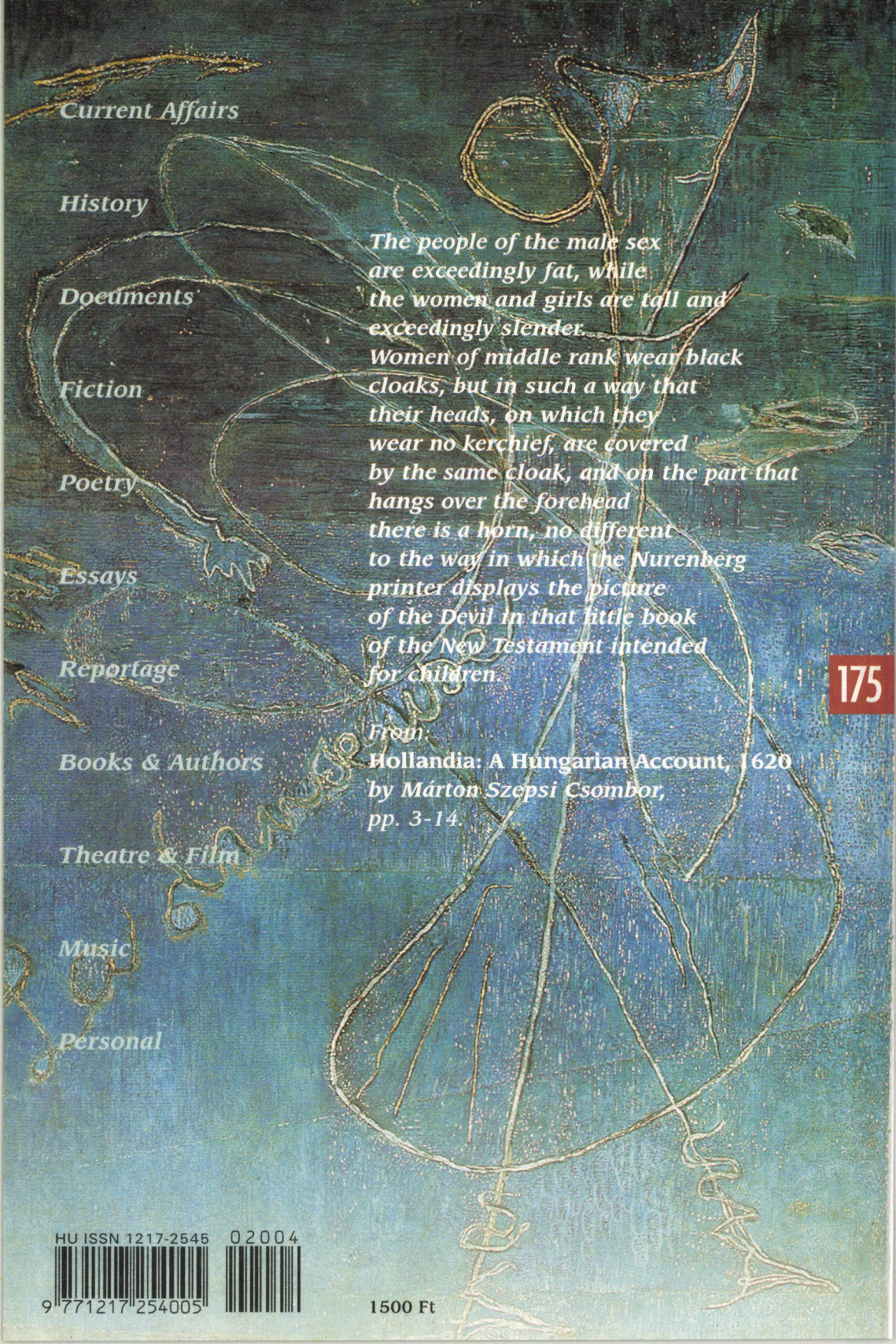

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The people of the male sex are exceedingly fat, while the women and girls are tall and exceedingly slender. Women of middle rank wear black cloaks, but in such a way that their heads, on which they wear no kerchief, are covered by the same cloak, and on the part that hangs over the forehead there is a horn, no different to the way in which the Nurenberg printer displays the picture of the Devil in that little book of the New Testament intended for children.

From:
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